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Reconsidering the 'Other':

Exploring Perceptions of Refugees in South Africa

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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This thesis is dedicated to all those working with and assisting refugees in South Africa. Together we are building a country that respects the rights of all who live in it.

Abstract

Refugees are generally perceived in very negative terms in South Africa. They are perceived as coming to South Africa to take advantage of the country's economy, of stealing jobs and using up scarce resources and of never intending to leave. Refugees are also conceptualised by some as being helpless and in need of direct intervention. This thesis considers the question 'How accurate are the general preconceptions about refugees in South Africa?' utilising qualitative data from six respondents collected over a two month period in 2007 in addition to evidence from working in the field prior to commencing this study. This thesis presents evidence that the decision to settle in South Africa is the result of complex processes influenced by a number of factors aside from economic considerations. The myth that refugees are helpless and needy is tackled with evidence illustrating the resourcefulness and resilience of the six respondents on arrival in Cape Town. The perception of refugees using up resources and stealing jobs from South Africans is challenged by evidence that refugees struggle to legalise their status and get little assistance from Non-Governmental Organisations. As a result, refugees create opportunities for themselves relying on networking and chance encounters. Finally, the perception that refugees never intend to leave South Africa is challenged by evidence of the complexities of returning 'home' where security is uncertain. Having considered the evidence, the thesis concludes that the general preconceptions about refugees in South Africa are in fact false.

Chapter 1: Refugees in South Africa: Introduction and Methodology	2
Refugees in South Africa	4
Perceptions of 'Refugees'	8
Methodology	10
Personal Background	10
Research Design	11
Fieldwork	12
Respondents	12
Challenges	15
Ethics	16
Conclusion	16
Chapter 2: Leaving Home: Complexities in the Decision to Migrate	17
Background and the Decision to Flee	18
Where to Settle?	21
Social Networks	22
Inappropriate Assistance and the Lack of Security in Refugee Camps	23
Chance Encounters	27
Perception of Greater Opportunities for One's Family	28
Lack of Viable Alternatives	30
Conclusion	30
Chapter 3: 'Vulnerable refugees'? Challenging perceptions of refugees as helpless and without agency	32
Conceptualisations of 'refugees'	32
'Refugees' in South Africa	34
Agency and Resourcefulness – Arriving in Cape Town	35
Strategies Employed by the Respondents	37
Struggles on Arrival	44
NGOs as a Safety Net	45
Conclusion	48
Chapter 4: Stealing Our Livelihoods? Challenging Perceptions that Refugees are a Threat to the Economy	50
Obstacles to legalising their status	50
NGO assistance	54
Rigid appointment systems	54
Limited resources	56
Type of assistance provided	57
Networking and Chance	58
Social networking	62
Conclusion	63
Chapter 5: 'Home'-less: Deciding to Stay or Leave South Africa	65
Conclusion	71
Chapter 6: Conclusion	73
References	76

Chapter 1: Refugees in South Africa: Introduction and Methodology

At the end of 2006, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that there were 9.9 million refugees worldwide with most concentrated in Africa and Asia (UNHCR, 2007a). This was the highest figure in five years mainly due to increases in the numbers of refugees fleeing Iraq as well as a change of method in calculating the numbers of refugees in the United States. South Africa, the United States, Kenya and France received the highest numbers of new asylum applications in 2006 with most new claims coming from Somalis, Iraqis and Zimbabweans.

Immigration encompassing refugee flows has become a highly political topic with 'aliens', 'asylum seekers' and 'illegal immigrants' being blamed for many countries' ills (Gibney, 2005; Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh and Singh, 2005). In this climate of fear, those fleeing situations of persecution and human rights abuses in their countries of origin find their stories treated with suspicion and disbelief (see Steel, Frommer and Silove, 2004). Many suspect asylum seekers of abusing this channel simply to obtain residence in a desired country.¹ Thus even the term 'asylum seeker' has become politically loaded in many countries with associations of "welfare cheats, competitors for jobs, security threats [and] abusers of host state generosity" (Gibney, 2005: 3). States have responded differently to this political issue. Dummett (2001) demonstrates the political attitude of states towards asylum by comparing the acceptance rates of Sri Lankan asylum seekers in Britain and Canada in 1996. Whilst Canada approved 82% of Sri Lankan asylum applications, Britain approved just 0.2% illustrating the anti-immigration nature of the regime at that time.

Refugee status is governed internationally by the 1951 United Nations (UN) Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and by the 1967 UN Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. These define a refugee as any person who

... owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to

¹ Under South African law, the term 'asylum seeker' refers to those who have applied for refugee status but whose applications have not yet been finalised. The term 'refugee' refers to those whose applications for refugee status have been successful.

avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside of the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it (UNHCR, 1951: 16).

This UN definition thus provides for refugee status to be awarded on an individual basis where the context of the applicant's situation will be taken into consideration.

In Africa, the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) (now the African Union) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa provides for refugee status to be awarded to groups of people fleeing generalised persecution. This definition provides refugee status to those who have left their country of origin "owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing the public order" (OAU, 1969: 2). Recent examples of these include the wars in Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Republic of Congo, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi and Mozambique and new conflicts continue to emerge. At the time of writing, conflict is ongoing in Kenya, Sudan, Chad, Somalia and the DRC. As a result, people continue to flee and seek asylum elsewhere at least for the duration of the conflict. These mass flows of people interact with the citizens of the destination countries and become a source of tension if not correctly managed. Because these phenomena are unlikely to abate any time soon, it is important to examine, critically, perceptions and stereotypes about refugees. This thesis examines a number of such perceptions in South Africa in order to answer the broader question: 'How accurate are the general preconceptions about refugees in South Africa?'

Chapter 2 will examine the perception that refugees are attracted to South Africa because of the 'lure' of South Africa's economy. Chapter 3 will explore perceptions that refugees are helpless and lack agency to act on their own behalf. Chapter 4 will question the perception that refugees have a good life in South Africa and Chapter 5 will unpack the perception that refugees intend to remain in South Africa indefinitely.

The findings of each chapter will illustrate that each of these perceptions are not accurate and tend to oversimplify complex issues. The implications of the findings are that South Africa needs to review the way in which it conceptualises 'refugees' in order to respond

more appropriately to the opportunities and challenges presented by the presence of refugees.

Refugees in South Africa

South Africa received the highest number of new asylum applications in Africa in 2006 with 53 361 new applications lodged during the year. South Africa's neighbours received relatively few applications with Mozambique receiving 964, Namibia 247 and Botswana just 62. Table 1 indicates the African countries where more than 1 000 people applied for asylum during 2006.

Table 1: Primary African Asylum Application Countries in 2006

Country of asylum	2006 Applications
South Africa	53 361
Kenya	37 496
Burundi	11 498
Sudan	10 217
Uganda	9 299
Egypt	7 131
Malawi	4 364
Cameroon	3 819
Zimbabwe	3 260
Ethiopia	2 819
Somalia	1 324
Guinea	1 228
Benin	1 154
Congo	1 111
Libya	1 050
Tanzania	1 031
Angola	1 023

Source: UNHCR, 2006: Table 6

Zimbabwe, Malawi and the DRC were the principal countries from which new asylum applicants came to South Africa in 2006, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Major Applications for Asylum in South Africa by Country of Origin in 2006

Country	Number
Zimbabwe	18,973
Malawi	6,377
DRC	5,582
Ethiopia	3,916
Bangladesh	3,074
Somalia	3,024
Tanzania	1,838
Pakistan	1,363
Congo	1,207
India	1,175

Source: UNHCR, 2006: Table 9

Given the large numbers of non-nationals making new applications in South Africa, the issue of refugees and asylum seekers has become a public concern. The media has described Zimbabweans, for example, 'pouring' or 'flooding' into the country, metaphors that heighten public fears (Forced Migration Studies Programme and Musina Legal Advice Office, 2007). Some news reports of Zimbabweans crossing into South Africa illegally have referred to a 'tsunami' of people – an image likely to frighten even the less conservative South Africans (Peta, Webb and De Lange, 2007; SAPA, 2007). Yet research done in the border regions has indicated that figures listed in the media have been highly exaggerated (Forced Migration Studies Programme and Musina Legal Advice Office, 2007).

South Africa's policy regarding refugees differs from that of most countries in Africa. Whereas most countries choose to restrict refugees to camps in border regions, South Africa has adopted a policy of allowing refugees to integrate by having nominal access to most of the same rights as South Africans. This has proved hard to realise in practice. South Africa's policy aimed to prepare refugees for a successful return to their countries of origin. This required refugees to develop skills whilst in exile, and to retain contact with

their country of origin so as to be able to determine when it was safe to return (Smith, 2003). When individuals arrive at a South African border and declare their intention to apply for asylum, they are issued with a Section 23 permit that allows 14 days in which to report to a Refugee Reception Office (RRO). These RROs are located in the five major centres of Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. There has also been talk of creating new RROs in Musina, Springbok and Nelspruit (DHA, 2006) but no further information on these developments has been forthcoming.

Newly arrived asylum seekers are thus directed to urban centres in order to comply with the law. Once they arrive in the centres, little is done by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) to reward their efforts at remaining within the law. Massive queues and chaotic crowds are common features of DHA RROs in South Africa (CoRMSA, 2007). There is little to guarantee that those with legal documents are attended to before their permits expire. It is thus highly likely that they will join the ranks of those who repeatedly wait outside the RRO in the hope of legalising their stay in South Africa or the ever-growing ranks of those who give up trying, remain in the country and therefore become 'illegal' and vulnerable to arrest and deportation at any time. The DHA currently has no mechanisms in place to record the names of those queuing outside its offices and thus there is no way for individuals to prove that they had indeed been queuing, unsuccessfully, for days, to renew their permits. A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report described undocumented non-nationals in South Africa as "liable to be arrested, detained, and deported in circumstances and under conditions that flout South Africa's own laws" (2007c: 5).

South African law allows anyone the right to apply for asylum. In terms of the Refugees Act of 1998, refugee status should be granted if an applicant qualifies in terms of either the UN definition or the OAU definition discussed above (Government Gazette, 1998). Despite this, many people who would not comply with this legal definition continue to apply for asylum in South Africa. This is due to the absence of other accessible mechanisms of legitimising one's stay. Currently the large gap between the formal work permit process - usually for highly-skilled individuals (and costly and requiring considerable documentation) - and the asylum process for those fleeing persecution has led scholars such as Maxine Reitzes (no date) to call for a labour migration regime allowing for more temporary labour migration.

To acquire legal 'refugee status' requires "a well-founded fear of persecution"; those who fall outside this definition are termed 'migrants'.² DHA has regularly bemoaned the abuse of the South African asylum system by migrants seeking to legitimise their stay in the country (Buthelezi, 2003). This accusation suggests that this is a deliberate act by people well informed about the requirements for refugee status. My own experience suggests otherwise.³ In terms of the Refugees Act of 1998, refugees are required to report to a Refugee Reception Office to have their permits renewed at regular intervals of around three months.⁴ New arrivals in the country are thus likely to settle in proximity to these offices until such time as their applications have been approved or rejected.⁵

Asylum seekers are issued with a Section 22 permit from DHA: a piece of A4 paper containing their details, a photo and fingerprints. This permit is then renewed on a regular basis of usually between three and six months and thus receives a number of stamps from DHA confirming its extension. This permit must be carried at all times to prevent arrest and deportation and thus this paper soon becomes somewhat dishevelled and illegible. Refugees are also issued with a Section 24, another A4 sheet of paper, that must be renewed every year or two depending on the circumstances under which a person was granted refugee status. Refugees with Section 24 permits can apply for refugee identity documents – maroon booklets similar to the green South African ID but valid for two years. Different types of service providers appear more confident about accepting refugee IDs than Section 22 permits but various administrative problems have plagued the relevant DHA offices so that in addition to the problems of access to DHA offices (discussed below), there have been significant delays in processing ID applications. Indeed many refugees reported that by the time their ID arrived, it had expired.

A further challenge is that South Africa provides very little in the way of social assistance to refugees or asylum seekers. The Department of Social Development provides a

² Guidelines as to what constitutes a 'well-founded' fear of persecution are published by UNHCR.

³ In my experience this is not the case. I have counselled individuals from countries such as Malawi who have openly declared in their interview at DHA that the reason they came to South Africa was due to poverty and hunger in their country. They have looked at me blankly when I have explained that these were not sufficient conditions to legitimise their stay and they would thus be forced to return. My experience and practical rationale suggests that many individuals are unlikely to be well acquainted with the complexities of immigration law. Instead, it is likely that many migrants have been informed of a way to 'get papers' and thus followed this route as it is the only legal way for those without the hard-to-attain work permits to legitimise their stay in South Africa.

⁴ The practices differ at the different Refugee Reception Offices.

number of grants such as a Foster Care Grant, Disability Grant and pension but these are very limited amounts. At the time of writing, refugees have little access to these. Preparations are being made to enable refugees to access grants such as the Foster Care Grant and the Disability Grant from 2008. The Social Relief of Distress Grant is reportedly available to refugees but I have yet to see money from this awarded to refugees.⁶ In addition, the Refugee Relief Fund is no closer to being implemented by the Department of Social Development (CoRMSA, 2007) than when proposed in 2006.⁷

Perceptions of 'Refugees'

Perceptions of refugees are largely influenced by institutions such as the media and political leaders. According to Fine and Bird (2006: 20) "the media contributes to xenophobia when it supports negative public perceptions of migrants, particularly African migrants, as illegal, criminal, threats to social and economic prosperity or carriers of diseases such as HIV/Aids". Simplistic discussion around non-nationals and the failure to acknowledge the complexities surrounding xenophobia lead to the "extension of these negative stereotypical discourses across all the broad types of migration" (Fine and Bird, 2006: 20). Media reporting can therefore have a crucial impact on shaping public perceptions of non-nationals.

A number of prominent politicians have made statements blaming non-nationals for using up resources and committing crime. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Minister of Home Affairs from 1994 to 2004, informed parliament in 1994 that "if we as South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with millions of aliens who are pouring into South Africa, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme" (Human Rights Watch, 1998). Buthelezi's leadership of the DHA was the subject of much controversy and was later to result in a direct intervention by President Thabo Mbeki due to Buthelezi's publishing repressive immigration regulations without consulting the Cabinet

⁵ Once an application for refugee status has been approved, a refugee has to renew it either every year or every two years depending on whether the circumstances under which the status was granted are likely to change in the near future.

⁶ In September 2007, around 40 Somali and Ethiopian nationals were displaced from Delmas, Mpumalanga after their shops were attacked by a group of youths. CoRMSA and our partners attempted to assist in accessing Social Relief of Distress funds but these claims were unsuccessful.

⁷ What this grant would entail has not yet been clarified.

(Nyamjoh, 2006). Former DHA Director-General Billy Masetlha also claimed before Parliament that

... approximately 90% of foreign persons, who are in the RSA with fraudulent documents, i.e. either citizenship or migration documents, are involved in other crimes as well... It is quicker to charge these criminals for their false documentation and then to deport them than to pursue the long route in respect of the other crimes that are committed" (Crush and Peberdy, no date: 1).

This comment thus claims a direct link between migration and criminality, an assumption more reflective of DHA's attitude towards non-nationals than of the actual non-nationals.

Such comments illustrate the manner in which the DHA has both conceptualised and responded to the mixed flows of non-nationals. These comments by South African leaders have generated much concern and led Acting South African Human Rights Commissioner Bertrand Ramcharan to suggest that

Refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers, undocumented migrants and other so-called 'non-citizens' are being stigmatised and vilified for seeking a better life. They are made scapegoats for all kinds of social ills, subjected to harassment and abuse by political parties, the media and society at large. (Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh and Singh, 2005: 9).

Some commentators have suggested that the campaign of scapegoating non-nationals is part of a misguided process of 'nation-building' whereby South Africans are encouraged to feel united by reflecting who they are not - in this case 'illegal aliens' (Croucher, 1998). Others have suggested this is government's mechanism of diverting attention away from failed service delivery by placing the blame on a visible target (Landau et al, 2005) thus playing on fears of competition for scarce resources. Regardless of the reason, perceptions of all non-nationals (and therefore refugees) in South Africa are overwhelmingly negative (Crush, 2001). Yet to what extent do these perceptions reflect reality? The following section details the methodology used in this study to answer that question.

Methodology

Personal Background

The research conducted for this report was not my first encounter with refugee issues. I have been involved in refugee work encompassing practical work and research since 2002 and thus began this research project with initial preconceptions and hypotheses. Many of these preconceptions have been challenged by my findings. For example, prior to conducting this research I placed much emphasis on refugees seeking assistance through NGOs whereas I am now aware that many individuals are generally not reliant on NGO provision and have been able to create opportunities for themselves in the absence of broad NGO service provision. I have conducted two prior fieldwork-based studies relating to refugees in Cape Town and the challenges they experience. I have also conducted many literature-based studies on broader issues of migration as well as specific aspects such as the asylum determination process at the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office.

Following from my earlier research, I was asked to join UCT Law Clinic as an unpaid intern at the beginning of 2006 and this allowed me to participate in the UNHCR national annual strategic planning sessions, the local *Tutumike* refugee service providers' network as well as providing training on refugee rights to a group of refugee leaders through the Sustained Advocacy for Empowered Refugees (SAFER) project. The primary aspect of my work with asylum seekers/refugees at UCT Law Clinic involved face to face counselling on issues such as access to health care, applying for asylum, applying for permanent residence and appealing against the rejection of one's application for refugee status. This experience was most valuable for assessing how some of the human rights challenges I had explored mainly through literature, affected refugees in very practical ways. As a result, my initial perceptions of such challenges had to be broadened to include practical and micro-level aspects that the macro-structural research had ignored.

During the write up phase of this study I was appointed as one of the two advocacy officers of the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) – formerly known as the National Consortium for Refugee Affairs. CoRMSA, based in Gauteng, is the co-ordinating body for the majority of the refugee and migrant service

providers across South Africa (including organisations such as Lawyers for Human Rights, UCT Law Clinic, the *Tutumike* service provider network and many others) and serves as an advocacy body vis-à-vis government and relevant others. Although this study reports only on the limited research conducted for this study in Cape Town, working at CoRMSA has confirmed the importance of the insights gained through fieldwork and provides an excellent opportunity to disseminate and implement those.

Research Design

This study does not claim to represent 'refugees in South Africa'. Applying the tried and tested anthropological approach of intensive qualitative data collection through informal and interpersonal interaction – 'hanging out' - with respondents, the resulting data are rather intended to provide insights from the lived experiences of individuals, against which current prevailing 'truths' are tested (Rodgers, 2004). The advantages of such 'hanging out' are that it keeps an open channel for the voices of forced migrants, helps appreciate the complexity of forced migration and because it reports on the experiences of actual people, is valuable in informing ethical policy development (Rodgers, 2004).

Landau and Jacobsen (2004) argue that research collected for the purpose of policy formulation needs to be representative of the population under consideration. Their initial article (2003) to which Rodgers (2004) provides a response, expresses frustration with research that calls for policy changes but is based on limited evidence. They therefore call for greater transparency, replicability and representativeness in policy-orientated research (Landau and Jacobsen, 2004). To provide such representativeness requires quantitative methods in the main. While the resultant data are valuable and necessary for policy making, they are, by definition, largely unable to address the qualitative complexity of individuals' experiences and tend to mask their political relevance by focusing on trends and numbers (see Malkki, 1995). In contrast, qualitative data can provide direct insight into the structures that shape the experiences of individuals. Since such 'structures' are usually the consequences of policy – whether its design or implementation – a deeper understanding of actual experience of those consequences surely contributes to formulating appropriate and effective policy. Clearly, both quantitative and qualitative methods are useful, necessary and, indeed complementary in most social research

(Hammersley, 1992). This study, albeit limited in scope, provides insight into the current structures that directly affect asylum seekers and refugees and the ways in which individuals respond to and interpret these structures. Illustrating the complex realities refugees face, as well as their responses, challenges prevailing simplistic perceptions and stereotypes of 'refugees'.

Fieldwork

Following the research principles above, I employed a variety of methods of collecting data. The methods employed shaped the data in some ways and promoted access to otherwise 'hidden' information but in other ways limited the form and extent of the data collected (Rodgers, 1996). Given the limited time for research of this nature and the complexity of the field, the variety of methods nevertheless provided a rich array of data.⁸

Principal research methods included in this study were:

- Structured and unstructured interviews
- Participant observation
- Informal conversations
- 'Hanging out' at key locations such as the Cape Town train station and the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office
- Formal monitoring at the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office⁹
- Meetings
- Confidential and public reports

This less structured approach was key to re-shaping my existing preconceptions. A more formal approach would have reduced the scope for people to tell me about their lived experiences and the ways in which they negotiate the complexities of leaving home, arriving in Cape Town and settling in to what is already a complex social situation.

Respondents

⁸ Six to eight weeks of fieldwork is required for Masters level research.

⁹ This was something I was recruited to do by UCT Law Clinic in terms of an agreement with the Legal Resources Centre and the Provincial Office of the Department of Home Affairs.

Given my concerns that the collection of rich data would rely on being able to obtain access to personal and sensitive information within a short space of time, I decided from the outset to work with individuals with whom I already had a relationship of trust. That familiarity avoided any attempts to provide answers shaped around what respondents often think a researcher is looking for, and also reduced the possibility of raising hopes or expectations of personal benefit from participation in the study. Thus I believed that my pre-existing relationships with the respondents would enhance and not compromise the research. As Amisi and Ballard (2005: 20) acknowledge, "attempting to enter [refugees' lives] as a complete outsider would have been much more difficult". On reflection, this strategy worked well and two of the respondents noted explicitly that they would not have discussed much of the more sensitive subject material covered in the interviews with a stranger. I was also comfortable enough to probe certain sensitive areas to a greater degree than I would have with strangers.

The six respondents I chose were all male, reflective of my work with refugees at this time since the majority of refugees in South Africa are men and it is usually the male family heads who negotiate legal structures on behalf of their kin. In formulating the research design, my supervisor and I agreed to concentrate on respondents from three countries. I chose to concentrate on people from the Great Lakes region as I had a good relationship with a number of Rwandan and DRC nationals and I valued the input of the Ugandan informant. This was useful in providing for similar experiences yet being able to compare the ways in which individuals responded differently to similar circumstances. On reflection, if a longer fieldwork period had been possible, it would also have been valuable to have input from people of other nationalities, such as Somalis, to assess whether their strategies complemented or contrasted with those from the Great Lakes region.

The respondents' ages range between 26 and 47. Simon is the youngest and Ruffin the oldest. Of the six, only Simon is not married and all the others live with their wives and children. Roger has three children, John has one and the other fathers each have two children.¹⁰ The children are all under the age of 15, which means in most cases that they were very young when they left their country of origin.

¹⁰ The names of all the respondents have been changed to protect their identities.

Despite my existing relationships with each respondent I had not discussed the research focus with them and so had not selected respondents whom I expected would provide me with particular information. Rather, in two interviews at respondents' homes my perceptions of their position were drastically altered in the way that they spoke about the situation. One lively jocular informant who I had perceived was making the best of his situation in South Africa became very depressed during the course of our interview and physically slumped down in his chair. Another respondent whom I had found myself feeling sorry for prior to our interview given the respect and dignity with which he conducted himself and my perceptions of his situation, seemed empowered by our discussion, smiling more than I had seen him do as he told me how he had overcome some difficult situations. This provided me with new insight into the way each saw his life according to his own perceptions.

The nature of my relationship with each respondent is listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Nature of past relationship with Respondents

Respondent	Year we met	Nature of relationship prior to research
Jean	2002	Sporadic casual conversations
Bosco	2002	Sporadic casual conversations, Conducted interview in 2002
Simon	2005	Sporadic casual conversations
John	2006	Conducted interview in 2006, occasional interactions
Roger	2006	Direct assistance - permanent residence appeal, occasional interaction
Ruffin	2007	Attended rights training workshop together

I chose to interview the respondents at the places they suggested so as also to have a chance to hang out with them. Five out of the six respondents were interviewed in their homes, which without exception were in cramped conditions behind their landlord's house. Interviews were conducted in English as my previous interaction with each respondent had illustrated that each was relatively comfortable in the language. I therefore decided not to work with a translator as I knew this would introduce potentially limiting dynamics relating to trust and shaping of people's stories by the translator. Interviews were recorded onto a digital voice recorder and transcribed. I also took copious notes during the interview process relating to the stories of the respondents as well as additional items such as manner of speaking, tone and body language.

In addition to interviews, I hung out with the respondents, participating in everyday activities such as visiting people at work, collecting one respondent's wife and child from hospital and going for coffee. I hung out with one respondent at training workshops and attended meetings with him and made follow up visits to others' houses. This provided me with less formal but equally valuable information where conversations were not shaped around my questions but rather along everyday interaction. This is reflective of Gudeman and Rivera's (1989) assertion of anthropology as an ongoing conversation with a variety of respondents both in and out of the field.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges during the course of this research was adjusting to the role of the researcher from the advocacy role I had previously played in my position at UCT Law Clinic. This was something I was acutely aware of during the course of fieldwork. It required a shift from trying to 'solve' situations to instead learning more about them so as to possibly be able to assist in the future. During my initial fieldwork observations at the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office I observed senior DHA officials behaving inappropriately towards the refugees queuing outside by pushing individuals so that they fell to the ground. Whilst my previous advocacy role was urging me to intervene, my role as a researcher suggested I should rather observe what transpired as this was unlikely to be isolated behaviour.

My role as researcher turned into a dual role of researcher and advocate two weeks later when I was contracted by UCT Law Clinic to do monitoring work at Cape Town Refugee Reception Office (CTRRO) to assist DHA and provide feedback on areas that could use improvement. This meant leading a team of students that would monitor the queues outside the CTRRO and record the names of newly arrived asylum seekers. At the end of the two week period I would write a report that would be submitted to the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office, UCT Law Clinic and the Legal Resources Centre. This dual role was also to impact upon the nature of my involvement.

Initially I tried to take on the advocacy role too much and overwhelmed myself with trying to 'solve' the challenges at DHA in the two weeks we had been assigned. My position at

the CTRRO required me to maintain a diplomatic position at DHA and thus work with the same officials whose behaviour I found objectionable. The relationship between the Cape Town-based refugee service providers and the staff of the CTRRO has generally been adversarial and hence I had to ensure that my role at the CTRRO was acceptable to both sides. This meant that I had to be diplomatic in the way I relayed any criticisms of actions by CTRRO and cautious whenever attempting interventions during this period. This was a big challenge for me but a useful learning exercise.

Later, during the interviews with respondents, I again became aware of the overlap between the role of advocate and researcher. During several interviews I made notes and later provided the respondents with referrals to organisations that could potentially assist them with specific matters. In discussing the reasons why respondents left their country of origin I was also aware of slipping into the role of advocate at times and asking questions more suited to a refugee status determination interview. At times I would find my focus shifting to asking questions more appropriate to an advocate than a researcher, and to maintain a balance between these and remain open to listening to the respondents rather than trying to 'solve' what I perceived as their 'problems', was a major challenge.

Ethics

I was given ethical clearance for the research on the basis of my research proposal and the research and presentation of findings have been conducted within the guidelines set by the Anthropological Association of South Africa.

Conclusion

Having explored the background to the study and discussed the methodology utilised to answer the research question, the following chapter will address the first problematic public perception that assumes that refugees are lured to South Africa by their perceptions of the opportunities provided by the South African economy.

Chapter 2: Leaving Home: Complexities in the Decision to Migrate

"South Africa, particularly, serves as a magnet to those seeking employment, a higher standard of living and brighter economic prospects. The size of the South African economy makes the allure of the country almost overwhelming to many in the region" (Solomon, 1996: 6).

Common perceptions in South Africa subscribe to a discourse in which the attraction of South Africa and its economy is inevitable to those living in other parts of Africa. In this discourse, all those who can through legal means, will find it impossible to resist the lure of South Africa and thus move to the country seeking 'a better life'. Those who cannot move through legal means will find alternative means of gaining entry such as by applying for asylum or else illegally crossing South Africa's 'porous' borders.

South Africa does indeed have the largest economy in Africa (World Bank, 2007). Its new democracy and its commitment to upholding human rights both in the country and elsewhere on the continent distinguishes it from many of its neighbours where fewer mechanisms exist to uphold human rights. Yet the myth of the 'inevitable lure' of the South African economy oversimplifies a complex issue and depoliticises the mass movement of populations (see Malkki, 1995). This chapter explores the experiences of the six respondents and examine the choices they faced and their decisions to flee as well as the choices of where to settle. The evidence thus illustrates that, far from the simplistic economic myth, the decision to seek asylum is shaped by factors such as information received through social networks; the inappropriate assistance and lack of security provided by refugee camps; chance encounters; perceptions about greater opportunities for one's family; and the lack of viable alternatives to applying for refugee status in South Africa.

Popular understandings around the presence of non-nationals in South Africa include accusations such as 'they have come to take our jobs' and 'they have come to steal our

women'.¹¹ Such perceptions have their own complex dimensions. Whilst human rights groups have endeavoured to inform South African citizens about the circumstances and rights of refugees, this does not always change people's attitude towards non-nationals. At a recent community meeting that I attended to discuss violence against Somali nationals in Delmas, Mpumalanga the presentation by a human rights group on why Somali nationals come to South Africa was met with a mixed reception. Some indicated this was useful information whilst others clearly indicated that they didn't care where these 'foreigners' were from or why they had come to South Africa – they still wanted the 'foreigners' to leave. Perceptions around the presence of non-nationals in South Africa and the way in which people respond to such perceptions are also complex. Having recognised these complexities, this chapter will instead tackle the dominant notion that refugees come to South Africa to take advantage of its economy and disprove this perception by illustrating that while economic factors do play a role, they are not necessarily the primary reason people come to South Africa.

Background and the Decision to Flee

Four of the six respondents in this study are from Rwanda. Rwanda burst onto the front page of global newspapers in 1994 with the assassination of President Juvenal Habyarimana and the genocide that followed. The lack of conclusive action taken to intervene in the genocide by the United Nations led to a situation where a sense of moral legitimacy accompanied the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) victory in the war and the general ignorance about the history of the country allowed the RPF to portray history in a convenient manner that cast the returning Tutsi diaspora as the 'rightful' occupiers of the land (Pottier, 2002).¹² Rwanda's post-1994 government has strived hard to project a positive image of the country's reconstruction after the genocide. Yet concerns remain about its ability to guarantee the human rights of all. Recent Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI) reports have expressed concern about extrajudicial police

¹¹ These sentiments have been communicated by a number of experts who have done work challenging perceptions of non-nationals. I have heard similar sentiments in community meetings I have attended.

¹² The Rwandan Patriotic Front was a primarily Tutsi party comprised of those who had been in exile in Uganda. Many of those in the party had grown up in exile after their parents fled Rwanda following civil unrest in 1959, 1972 and other years. Led by US-trained Paul Kagame, many of those serving in the military wing the Rwandan Patriotic Army had also served in the Ugandan National Revolutionary Army that brought Yoweri Museveni to power in 1985.

executions, the banning of the national human rights organisation and the detention of opposition politicians and journalists (HRW, 2007a; HRW, 2002; AI, 2005).

Jean fled Rwanda as a teenager during the genocide in 1994 and had been on the move ever since. At the time he left he had been attending high school and had completed Grade 8. He met his wife Maria in a refugee camp in Burundi and they had their two children whilst in the camp. He had stayed in this refugee camp in Burundi until the person charged with the protection of the refugees was killed by Burundian rebels and the camp's residents then fled to other camps.

They kill the person who look after us, the one who was looking after the camp. And then also, they killing some refugees. They kill some of the refugees where you call Kuramikyabo [the name of the refugee camp in Burundi]. And then the situation was not good in the camp when they want they can come and fetch [people] in the camp. Some things like that. And then I decided to leave.

The lack of security in the Burundian camps forced Jean and his family to keep moving.

Roger and Bosco had also fled the genocide in 1994 and were both forcibly returned to Rwanda in 1996 from DRC and Burundi, respectively. Their forcible return to Rwanda followed a period where the new RPF-controlled Rwandan government was trying to track down and forcibly return the remaining *genocidaires* who had taken refuge in other countries.¹³ Records from the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in Arusha show that those on trial there suspected of committing acts of genocide have been arrested in a variety of countries such as Togo, Cameroon and Belgium (ICTR, 2007).

Roger is from a prominent political family active in the formation of a major Hutu party and feared persecution due to this association on his return to the small town of Kibuye where large numbers of Tutsis were killed in 1994. He subsequently left Rwanda again later in 1996. Bosco had returned to Rwanda and commenced studies at the national university in Butare. In 2001, after questioning the arrests of a number of Hutu students following completion of their studies his house was visited by the military and three other students were detained. Bosco was not at home at the time and was able to flee the country.

¹³ The term refers to those responsible for the genocide.

Simon, the youngest of the respondents, had left Rwanda in 2002 after a security threat from the country's former regime emerged in the border area where he comes from. Cross border raids from the DRC by members of the previous regime's army or remnants of the *Interahamwe* militias were not uncommon and the close proximity of Gisenyi in Rwanda to Goma in the DRC, the site of a number of refugee camps, meant that residents of Gisenyi were constantly vulnerable to this threat.¹⁴ Rwanda has used the occurrences of such raids as justification for its military actions in the DRC (Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 2005).

Uganda appears often in news headlines due to the conflict that has ravaged its north western regions for the last 20 years. The conflict with the Lord's Resistance Army has resulted in the displacement of around 1 586 000 people. Yet further human rights concerns such as the increase in the use of torture as a tool of interrogation by Ugandan security forces rarely register in the international press (HRW, 2004). More concerning is that these abuses are not acknowledged by the Ugandan government thus providing little recourse for victims of torture and other abuses. John decided to leave Uganda in 2004 after being abducted and tortured by security forces who took exception to his public stance against continued abuses committed by the military. A Human Rights Watch report from 2004 confirms the use of torture by the military and security personnel where the government "fosters an enabling climate" that allows such human rights abuses to persist (HRW, 2004: 4).

The conflict in the DRC has gone through a number of phases in recent times. Long term military dictator Mobutu Sese Seko was deposed following an uprising in the east by forces led by Laurent Kabila and secretly supported by Uganda and Rwanda (ISS, 2005; Pottier, 2002). Various former allies of Kabila's have since claimed their own territory in the eastern regions ensuring the continuation of conflict. Whilst elections in 2006 provided a measure of stability no lasting security has yet been brought to the troubled eastern regions (HRW, 2007b). These conflicts have triggered the exodus of thousands of citizens of the affected states into countries such as Tanzania, Zambia and the DRC itself. Ruffin from the DRC became stateless when he attempted to return from working in Mozambique for the host government in 1997 and had his service passport confiscated at

¹⁴ The *Interahamwe* militias were blamed for much of the killing during the 1994 genocides.

the border for allegedly being a 'Mobutuist'.^{15 16} This was due to a popular perception of people from his home region having been favoured by Mobutu's government as well as Ruffin having served time in the diplomatic corp.

Each of the respondents in this study tells a story reflecting the complexities involved in forced migration and in each case it was a rational decision to flee. Each of the respondents also had 'well-founded fears' for leaving their country of origin. All of these occur outside of a system where the violations of such rights could be addressed through courts or other means. Four of the respondents had reason to fear from employees of the state whilst Simon was not provided with adequate protection by the state against an external threat.

Having explored the reasons for each respondent leaving their country of origin, it is clear that the primary reason for each leaving related more to 'push' factors of persecution than any potential 'pull' factors such as the lure of South Africa's economy. In each case, the respondent's principle concern was to 'get out' of his country rather than an ambition to reach a specific destination. The decision of where to settle was a secondary process shaped by a number of different factors.

Where to Settle?

Having decided to leave their countries the respondents were faced with a number of choices of where to move to. These choices would have been guided by the various resources they each had (such as finances), their networks and their ability to obtain information through the latter. In only two cases was South Africa the intended destination. As Roger states "You see when you run away you don't have a choice, like 'I'm going to stay here forever'. You just run away and then see where your life takes you" (Roger, interview, 23.05.2007).

¹⁵ A person who is 'stateless' has been prevented from claiming his/her nationality.

¹⁶ The term 'Mobutuist' in this context refers to those thought to have benefited from Mobutu Sese Seko's reign.

Social Networks

In 2002, the British Home Office commissioned research into the factors that lead to asylum seekers deciding on which country to seek asylum in. Koser and Pinkerton's (2002) report on social networks formed part of this. This report found that social networks are not the only source of information utilised by potential asylum seekers but are the most trusted source for up to date information on which countries to apply for asylum in. Other sources include the media and formal institutions. Social networks therefore can play an important role in providing asylum seekers with information on which to base their decision of where to settle.

Simon reports meeting up in Tanzania with friends from Rwanda who were now living there. They were able to provide him with important information about South Africa as this extract from our interview shows:

Simon: You know I chose South Africa because when you hear the people they say that South Africa is safer than other places.

Duncan: Ok. So you did not know anyone here in South Africa when you left?

Simon: Ya, but you hear about it maybe at home or in Tanzania. When you get to Tanzania you get the information about South Africa there.

Duncan: Where about in Tanzania did you get this information?

Simon: The places... Like that town, how do you call it? Kariako in Tanzania.

Duncan: And who tells you this information?

Simon: The friends we meet there.

Duncan: Friends from?

Simon: Friends from my country they are living there.

Duncan: People that were friends before?

Simon: Ya, like the people we know before and then they went out. When we get to Tanzania then we meet them there.

Duncan: How did they know about South Africa?

Simon: Maybe they've also got the friends or maybe some of them they're also coming from South Africa and maybe they're back to Tanzania.

Koser and Pinkerton's report suggests the value of information provided in transit countries as "many asylum seekers leave their country of origin with only a vague notion of a final destination, and then narrow their choice in transit" (2002: 3). The impact of

social networks is evident in Simon's experience as is the circular nature of migration. If these Rwandan nationals had indeed been to South Africa it is likely that they would most likely have applied for asylum in order to have documentation legitimising their stay. Yet it is clear from their presence in Tanzania that their desire was not to settle permanently in South Africa and this provides further evidence of the fluid nature of migration.

Social networks therefore have had an impact upon the decision of one respondent to come to South Africa yet there are also numerous other factors responsible. One such factor is the inappropriate nature of refugee camps for anything other than short term security.

Inappropriate Assistance and the Lack of Security in Refugee Camps

There are over 170 refugee camps in Africa (Jamal, 2003: 4). According to Jamal (2003: 4), "camps may serve an important emergency protection function but, in the long run, they deny refugees the freedoms that would enable them to lead productive lives". As most African countries restrict refugees to camps, these provide little in the way of developing the skills people have and therefore they are likely to find them unfulfilling. Many refugee camps are situated in rural border regions where for many people income is primarily derived from agricultural activities. This is likely to be inappropriate for urban-based individuals who find themselves in such camps. John describes the situation inside a camp near Kigoma in Tanzania:

I think also that one has affected me, being in Kigoma and the experience what was happening there. I was somebody who had a lot of things.... I am not somebody who can sit and ask for porridge... You are just there. You just wake up in the morning. When you go there they give you two blankets, they tell you to construct your tent using whatever you can use and then you're just sitting there. You wait for trucks to bring cassava. I mean maize, you know. And beans you see. You just sit there. So I had to escape there. I don't feel safe. I was feeling abandoned.

For many of those who have fled their country, being confined to a refugee camp in a rural area represents stagnation rather than a chance to further their opportunities. Some people prefer to take their chances and live undocumented in the urban areas around the

camps whilst others travel to South Africa where refugees are provided with freedom of movement and not confined to refugee camps.

Problems associated with long-term encampment include "material deprivation, psychosocial problems, violence, sexual exploitation, exploitative employment and resort[ing] to negative coping mechanisms" (Jamal, 2003: 4-5). As a survivor of torture, John had experienced much trauma prior to his arrival in the camp. Little appears to have been provided in the camps to deal with these experiences hence John's feeling of abandonment.

In Kigoma the experience I got there, it's a lifetime experience you know. You can really know that in this bright world there are some dark parts that are not attended to, that are not visible to people. And there's a lot of suffering there - abandonment. These people are completely cut off from the world. You are dumped like the city council can come and pick up rubbish, dump it in the dustbin and completely forget about it. That's what happens there. And that was very traumatic. I had to find my way out of there.

To John, the refugee camps represented being cut off from the world and kept out of sight like "rubbish". Life in the camps was about waiting – for food, for handouts and for change that may allow a person to return home. John also outlines his difficulties in being dependent on others for handouts. As a well-placed government employee John had money and opportunities prior to leaving Uganda and the culture of dependency within the camps was foreign to him. John thus "escaped" the refugee camp and made his way back to Dar es Salaam (John, interview, 21.05.2007).

As a Ugandan refugee in a camp in Tanzania John would have been a minority. Many of the Ugandan nationals displaced by fighting between government forces and the Lord's Resistance Army in the north of the Uganda tend to flee to neighbouring DRC or else move to Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps (ISS, 2003). As a Ugandan refugee in a camp in Tanzania there was thus no sense of the shared identity or solidarity that was an important part of camp life for Burundian refugees in Malkki's (1992) study.

Malkki (1992: 35) describes how Hutu refugees living in a refugee camp in Tanzania since fleeing Burundi in 1972 had been engaged in "an impassioned construction and reconstruction of their history as "a people"". Their shared setting and shared experience in a "rigorously organised, isolated refugee camp" was thus conducive to their construction

of themselves as the "rightful natives" of Burundi - a nation in exile (*ibid.*). The camp setting was also to impact upon identity formation. According to Malkki (1992: 35),

Being a refugee, a person was no longer a citizen of Burundi, and not yet an immigrant in Tanzania. One's purity as a refugee had become a way of becoming purer and more powerful as a Hutu.

Durieux (2000) too notes that feelings of Hutu 'nationalism' amongst Hutu refugees in western Tanzania were reinforced by exile which thus also "gradually dissolves the cruelty of internal conflict into an almost mythical aura of just war" (Durieux, 2000: 31). Such solidarity and identity reconstruction was absent from John's experience. The vast majority of those in camps in Tanzania are from Burundi or the DRC (UNHCR, 2006: table 5). This would have likely further reinforced John's feelings of abandonment and isolation – a pattern that was further reinforced on arrival in Cape Town.

Both Roger and Bosco had also previously lived in camps. Having experienced life in camps in Burundi and the DRC from 1994 to 1996 and then been forced to return to Rwanda, instead of returning to such camps both individually chose to seek opportunities in South Africa. Having been forced to return to Rwanda once, both Roger and Bosco were mindful to avoid settling in a country from where they could be forcibly returned.¹⁷ As Roger states:

What made me decide to come to South Africa was that each country we went to the Rwandan government had negotiated with them to actually take us back by force...Tanzania it was the same. In each camp, they want to take us by force. We run away to Malawi, they try to take us by force. So we ended up in South Africa.

South Africa, he thought, would be better. Despite not knowing detailed information about the social conditions in the country, the much publicised transition to democracy and introduction of a Constitution including a Bill of Rights provided enough incentive for him.

At least South Africa has a constitution which is in place which protects people which compared to the other countries we went through, it won't be the same. We didn't know

¹⁷ When the genocide broke out in Rwanda in 1994, over two million people fled the country and sought refuge in countries such as Tanzania, the DRC and Burundi (ISS, 2005). The situation in the DRC has been well documented where *Interahamwe* and ex-FAR soldiers were able to regroup and re-arm in refugee camps and hold civilians hostage (ISS, 2005). Rwanda and some of the regional governments co-operated by forcing large numbers of refugees to return to the country so that those responsible for the genocide would be held accountable. This secondary mass movement of people led to further incidents such as those as the Kibeho refugee camp where Rwandan soldiers opened fire on the mainly Hutu returnees in the camp killing large numbers (HRW, 1996).

exactly about South Africa [before we arrived]. Actually what we heard on the radio or read in the news or magazines we found that South Africa is a civilised country. So we didn't know about the South African conditions but we knew there was some order in place, better than all the countries we went through.

Roger's perceptions of safety and the protection of human rights in South Africa shaped his desire to apply for asylum in the country. Bosco was further motivated to apply for asylum in South Africa as it is located far from Rwanda and the Rwandan government was less likely to try to return him from South Africa. His point was further illustrated by his decision to move to Cape Town to get away from the Rwandan embassy located in Pretoria. Roger and Bosco's initial experience of refugee camps had failed to provide them with protection from the Rwandan government and this experience shaped a decision to settle in a country far from Rwanda where refugees were not kept in camps.

Life in refugee camps is therefore not desirable for different reasons. As an alternative, a Somali associate of mine informed me of a migration strategy available to Somali refugees in Kenya. With large refugee camps in the north east of the country providing access to basic needs such as food, accommodation, education and health care, many people were content that their families would be safe in these camps. This freed them to proceed onwards to seek opportunities elsewhere on the continent as a survival strategy in terms of earning more income for the family or furthering their skills in anticipation of being able to return home one day. How common this strategy is is unknown but in light of the evidence from John, it appears that the UNHCR encampment policy could also serve the function of stimulating further migration as individuals, frustrated by the lack of opportunities provided in the camps, proceed to take their chances elsewhere on the continent.

Life in the refugee camps across Africa is thus not an attractive option for individuals who have sufficient resources to be able to travel to alternative destinations. Some may find the provisions of refugee camps inappropriate whilst others may find that such camps do not provide sufficient security. Whilst those who are completely destitute are likely to have to rely on the provisions from refugee camps, those who are able to are likely to seek

asylum in a country that does not confine them to refugee camps but instead allows them to move freely and pursue economic activities such as South Africa.

Chance Encounters

Chance encounters can also play a role in determining where a person applies for asylum. Having left the refugee camp in the west of Tanzania, John hitched his way back to Tanzania and decided to look for the offices of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) which he knew about from his days in Kampala and which he knew provided assistance to migrants. Whilst looking for the IOM offices John stopped a passing 4x4 vehicle and asked the Canadian driver for help.

I was dusty. I looked very dirty you know... I was hungry you know... Now I talk to this guy and tell him I'm looking for IOM offices. I don't know Tanzania. Then this guy had worked in UNHCR. He knew the lives of refugees you know. Then he was working with some Canadian company, a construction company in Dar es Salaam... He drove me to his office address and he told me you can come back tomorrow and I can give you some help. So the next day I went to him and that guy got me some clothes. He gave me some money and he took me to his house. He is my hero... He is like an angel sent from heaven to redeem me and go back to heaven.

This was an incredible bit of good fortune for John given that many expatriates would have been unlikely to help him especially given his dusty condition. The fact that this individual had worked with the UNHCR and was aware of some of the conditions for refugees in Tanzania made this chance encounter all the more fortunate. Having provided John with accommodation, food and clothes, John's Canadian benefactor then provided him with some advice.

So this guy was paying for my food, the accommodation in the guest house and giving me clothes... Then when I was there I thought I could get a job. I had my qualifications and I wanted to get a job. And he told me its not easy to get a job in Tanzania because there are no jobs. So as we were speaking he told me he'd been to Cape Town. He had worked here in Cape Town. He told me the only jobs here, you can go and do security. Or you can go and work in the restaurants. He was saying if you can go and learn Afrikaans it will be very easy for you to get a job. So that guy gave me \$300 because he was also leaving Dar es Salaam. He didn't want to leave me there... He did help me a lot actually. He's my hero. So

I came here [to Cape Town]. I never knew anybody. But he told me to reach Cape Town and there is someone he used to work with...

The Canadian national thus provided John with material assistance as well as information on greater opportunities than in Dar es Salaam. His provision of a contact in Cape Town provided John with the incentive to move there in the hope of accessing similar assistance from him.

Perception of Greater Opportunities for One's Family

The possibility of opportunities for his family and specifically the possibility of improved access to essential health care shaped the decision of one respondent to move to South Africa. Jean had made his way with his family to Zimbabwe after a number of years in Burundi.¹⁸ Jean's youngest son is severely mentally challenged and needs constant care including assistance using the toilet. The cause of this is not known but the chances of it relating to a complication during pregnancy or giving birth are high given the lack of access to quality health care they would have had whilst living in refugee camps. Care for his son was then and remains a key factor for Jean in shaping key aspects of his life.

What I was knowing, I had some information for my child. [South Africa] can help my child for the hospital things. Because my child, he is sick neh? I was trying in Zimbabwe but it was so hard for him. So that's why. Even some of the doctors from Zimbabwe they were saying South Africa it can be better for my child.

The information Jean was provided with by other refugees and the Zimbabwean doctors thus indicated that South Africa would afford greater chances of providing his son with better health care and thus offering him the chance of a better life. As a father, this is not an opportunity he could turn down. Jean thus moved to South Africa where he has been able to access some health care for his son although the situation is not greatly improved.

19

¹⁸ When I asked Jean about the length of time he spent in each place and the reasons for him leaving he consistently said "I don't remember". My perception was that this was very difficult time was him to talk about and I preferred not to push the issue.

¹⁹ This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

The perception of greater opportunities for Jean's family was thus a key element in shaping his decision to move to South Africa.

Lack of Viable Alternatives

The lack of viable alternatives shaped Ruffin's decision to apply for asylum in South Africa. Once his passport was seized at the DRC border as he tried to return home, Ruffin had no documentation to prove the validity of his stay in any country. If he returned to Malawi or Mozambique where he had spent lengthy periods of time, he would be kept in a refugee camp and unable to continue the productive lifestyle he had maintained by opening and running language schools in both countries. He could not approach the Congolese embassy back in Mozambique given the change in regime in the DRC which now turned him into a target as a suspected collaborator of Mobutu.

Despite this, Ruffin did seek to apply for refugee status in Mozambique but was informed that repatriation efforts were going ahead to return refugees to the DRC now that the war was over and they were not accepting new applications. Ruffin then made his way to Swaziland and tried to apply for refugee status there but was again informed that no new refugee status applications were being accepted and he was advised by UNHCR to come to South Africa. Seeing no other alternative, Ruffin then took a taxi to the South African town of Piet Retief and later applied for asylum in South Africa. It is clear that South Africa was not Ruffin's first choice of destination to apply for asylum. Having been unsuccessful in applying in Mozambique and Swaziland he was left with little alternative but to apply in South Africa.

Conclusion

The myth of the 'inevitable lure' of South Africa's economy is thus certainly not valid for these and many other non-nationals in South Africa. Instead this oversimplification masks complex social and political realities relating to the mass movement of people in Africa. In all six cases, the primary process of the decision to leave one's country was predominantly shaped by 'push factors' where the respondents felt their lives were at risk. The decision of where to settle was a secondary process that was shaped by factors such as the information provided by social networks, the inappropriate provisions and lack of security of refugee camps, the perception of greater opportunities for one's family and a

lack of viable alternatives. The perception that most non-nationals leave their countries of origin in order to take advantage of South Africa's resources is thus a false perception.

Far from being lured by the attraction of the South African economy, each respondent had differing and complex reasons for moving to South Africa. Social networks played a role in providing information about South Africa as a desirable country to seek asylum in as well as the possibilities of accessing essential health care there. Accommodation and life in refugee camps was inappropriate and too stagnant for John and this new dependency and isolation made it impossible for him to continue to live there. A chance encounter with a Canadian national provided him with the incentive to move to South Africa. The lack of security provided by refugee camps shaped Bosco and Roger's decisions to move to South Africa. The possibility for Jean that he may be able to access improved health care for his son in South Africa shaped his decision to relocate and the lack of viable alternative to seeking asylum in South Africa for Ruffin resulted in him settling in the country.

Chapter 3: 'Vulnerable refugees'? Challenging perceptions of refugees as helpless and without agency

'Refugees' as a category have been conceptualised as a group of needy, helpless individuals completely dependent on the protection of host governments (Pupavac, 2006). Such imagery has been reinforced by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the media for different reasons and is evident in the minds of many South African citizens and government officials who emphasise a fear of refugees and other non-nationals 'draining' South Africa's resources (Landau et al, 2005; Landau, 2005). Words such as 'vulnerable' and 'protection' are two terms I have heard frequently used in a variety of contexts when discussing refugees and both imply that refugees are reliant on others to take care of and protect them. UNHCR has declared the theme for the 2008 World Refugee Day 'Protection' implying a paternalistic relationship with refugees. This chapter examines such stereotypes and explores the ways in which these can serve to deny agency to refugees.²⁰ This chapter thus challenges such conceptualisations using the evidence of the six respondents and by exploring their initial actions on arrival in Cape Town for the first time. These actions demonstrate the resilience and resourcefulness of refugees in the absence of direct service provision.

Conceptualisations of 'refugees'

Malkki (1995) traces the origin of the concept of 'the refugee' from the post-World War II period when 'refugees' were largely regarded as a problem and a military issue, to the creation of international organisations dedicated to providing 'refugee assistance' and therefore a shift to conceptualising 'refugees' as a social and humanitarian issue. As Malkki notes, "In this transformation of "the problem" from the military to the social and humanitarian, the refugee camp as a productive device of power played a vital role. The camps made people accessible to a whole gamut of interventions, including study and documentation, and the post-war figure of the modern refugee largely took shape in these camps" (1995: 500).

Arendt (in Malkki, 1995) detailed the necessity of conceptualising displacement in terms of the often xenophobic national states as the political and symbolic logics they provide had the effect of "pathologising and even criminalising refugees" (Malkki, 1995: 502). This relationship between refugee and state is key to understanding the conceptualisation of 'the refugee' as 'the other' or as a special identity detached from local social identities. In this way, 'refugee' has become a distinct identity. A distinctive identity as 'refugee' is not shaped only by non-refugees. At times refugees too play into this. On one occasion I offered a lift home to Ruffin and some of his colleagues and I apologized for the state of my car which is usually none too clean. Ruffin's response, without the expected irony, was 'That's okay, we are refugees' implying that being a refugee gave rise to low expectations and accepting whatever they could get.

'Refugees' have largely been seen from an administrator's point of view regarding numbers, patterns and trends and, because they are seen as a 'problem', as needing assistance. A more critical perspective views refugee movements as primarily political phenomena and would require exploration of topics such as "the use of civilian population displacements in political struggles among states; the global social life of the arms trade; [on] the interpenetrations of the language of diplomacy with the language of international refugee aid, and so on" (Malkki, 1995: 205). Organisations such as the UNHCR are situated politically in global power relations in such a way as to uncritically conceptualise refugees in administrative rather than political terms.²¹

In this way, 'refugees' have largely been seen from a functionalist and essentialist perspective and have been perceived almost as "an essentialised anthropological "tribe"" (Malkki, 1995: 511). This lends itself to thinking that all refugees have a similar 'culture' or condition by virtue of their refugee-ness. This condition has been perceived as one of need and desperation. Pupavac (2006:1) suggests that perceptions of 'refugees' have been reconfigured from the "political heroes and courageous defenders of freedom", as Cold War refugees defecting to the West were depicted, to a current image of a 'refugee' as a "feminised, traumatised victim". Common media images reinforce such perceptions

²⁰ The agency of refugees has already been introduced in Chapter 2.

²¹ The UNHCR occupies a diplomatic position in each country where it operates and is there as a 'guest' of the state. This naturally shapes a generally uncritical relationship with the host state as well as others where it also operates. For example, large numbers of people continue to flee the DRC but UNHCR requires a diplomatic relationship with the DRC government in order to maintain its refugee camps there which are host to large numbers of people from Burundi and Uganda.

perhaps to generate action in addressing refugee crises. Such representations often centre on iconic images such as "a grief-stricken woman, clutching her head or child in despair, underscoring refugees' desperate situation" (Pupavac, 2006: 1). In this conceptualisation, 'refugees' are powerless and unable to act for themselves.

'Refugees' in South Africa

Arendt's (in Malkki, 1995) assertions regarding the logic of xenophobic states having the effect of pathologising and criminalising refugees is valid for South Africa. The former Minister of Home Affairs, ultimately responsible for the issuing and renewal of relevant documents to refugees and asylum seekers on a number of occasions decried the 'abuse' of the asylum system in South Africa by those seeking a better life. In 2003 at a speech at the Refugee Appeal Board year end function, Mangosutho Buthelezi stated, "We all know that the lion's share of the resources allocated for asylum and refugee protection are, unfortunately, taken up and wasted by people who seek to abuse the system and lodge patently unfounded asylum applications which need, nonetheless, to be processed through all the relevant stages" (Buthelezi, 2003). Such statements have the effect of casting suspicion and blame on all those who apply for refugee status.

Mangosutho Buthelezi was notorious for his anti-foreigner utterances. In his first address to parliament in 1994 he declared that "If we as South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with millions of aliens who are pouring into South Africa, then we can bid good-bye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme" (in Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh and Singh, 2005:). This frames non-nationals as arriving in overwhelming numbers to take advantage of South Africa's resources such as health care and housing.

The public have responded to the 'concerns' raised by government and in the media. Discussions about non-nationals have tended to be negative and focused on perceptions that 'illegal immigrants' are all involved in crime. This has been a topic that CoRMSA has had to address a number of times in the media. Stereotypes of non-nationals are shaped freely casting different categories of non-nationals in homogenous groups. 'The Nigerians' are perceived as dealing in drugs and being involved in other criminal activities. No attempts are made to acknowledge the difference between some who may be involved in

crime and other Nigerian citizens such as Professor Kole Omotoso of the University of the Western Cape who make a valuable contribution to South Africa.

The debate around Zimbabwean nationals has centred on the legality of their presence in the country. Some South Africans believe that people in the country without the correct documents should have no access to rights at all and the police should be allowed to mistreat and abuse them. These are comments that have been addressed to me by some members of the public in the wake of the South African Police Services (SAPS) raid on the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg on 30th January 2008. There have been serious concerns about the conduct of the police during this raid with accusations of theft, assault and racist and xenophobic language being directed at non-nationals seeking sanctuary inside the church. Police also reportedly told Zimbabwean nationals inside the church they “dirtify [sic] our country” (Seale, 2008).

Public perceptions around non-nationals play an important role in how people interact with non-nationals regardless of their legal status in the country. For this reason it is important that inaccurate perceptions are addressed. ‘Refugees’ and other non-nationals in South Africa are therefore perceived as ‘needy’, using up South Africa’s resources and criminals trying to take over the country. This next section will explore whether these perceptions of refugees as ‘needy’ and helpless are accurate by exploring the actions of the six respondents on arrival in Cape Town to determine whether they were reliant on authorities for assistance or whether they formulated mechanisms to help themselves.

Agency and Resourcefulness – Arriving in Cape Town

Arriving in a new city in a foreign country presents both opportunities and challenges that are shaped by factors such as access to material resources, contacts within the city, ability to network and a bit of luck. South Africa’s public transportation networks between urban areas are primarily served by long distance buses although minibuses also cover some of the same routes. A railway line connects Cape Town to Johannesburg and Durban and there are frequent trains between these points. New arrivals in Cape Town are thus most likely to arrive at either the central train station or the long-distance bus station situated next door. Cape Town train station is situated in the central business

district of Cape Town. It consists of the Shosholozha station serving national destinations and the Metrorail station serving the local metropolitan areas. Attached to the train station is the bus station with services to destinations such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Port Elizabeth and international destinations such as Windhoek in Namibia. The train station also leads on to the large Golden Acre shopping centre and is surrounded by informal markets with the famous tourist attraction of Greenmarket Square market also situated nearby.

On each day that I conducted fieldwork at Cape Town station it was crowded with people arriving or departing by train, shopping at one of the stalls or else passing through the station on their way to another destination in central Cape Town. It was generally noisy with the noise of the trains, unintelligible platform announcements and the product of the numerous conversations taking place between the many commuters and vendors. New arrivals at Cape Town station are likely to be met immediately by the noise and confusion of a large number of people speaking in different languages. If they have not developed a strategy of what to do on arrival, they are likely to become caught up in this confusion and could thus overlook some potentially useful sources of information. If the new arrival is more confident and is actively seeking out those who could offer information, there are a large number of resources available in the vicinity of Cape Town station.

Confidence in arriving in a new place will be dependent upon the resources a person has. None of the six respondents speaks English as first language and none knew Afrikaans or IsiXhosa on arrival in Cape Town.²² Each of the respondents had asylum seeker permits by the time they arrived in Cape Town having obtained these in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Durban. Of the six, Ruffin had been in the country by far the longest at three years. Jean had been in Pretoria for five months, Simon and John had been in South Africa for two months and Roger and Bosco had been in South Africa for less than a week. None of the respondents had previously visited Cape Town prior to resettling in the city.

Each had different reasons for resettling. Ruffin had been the victim of tension between South Africans and non-nationals over informal trading rights in Pretoria, Jean and Simon had been informed of greater employment opportunities in Cape Town, John had been provided with the name of a colleague of the Canadian national he had met in Tanzania

²² Two widely spoken languages indigenous to South Africa.

(see Chapter 2) whom he hoped would assist him, Roger had heard that he could obtain shelter for his family at a specific night shelter, and Bosco had no set destination but wanted to move far away from the Rwandan embassy in Pretoria to prevent being recognised and forced to return to Rwanda.

Five of the six respondents (Jean, Roger, Simon, John and Bosco) arrived at the train station and one (Ruffin) arrived at the bus station. Roger and Jean were accompanied by their wives and children whilst the other four participants were alone. This was a key factor in shaping Roger's and Jean's strategies on arrival as it would be far easier for a stranger to provide a night's accommodation for a single person rather than his whole family. Each of the respondents had different resources on arrival in Cape Town. Each respondent had some money except for Bosco who arrived penniless. Only Ruffin had sufficient money to check into a hotel if necessary whilst the others had only enough to ensure they could buy food for a few days. Additional resources such as networking, culture and language and the utilisation of these to access assistance are explored below.

Strategies Employed by the Respondents

The six respondents employed a number of different strategies on their arrival in Cape Town. These strategies were fluid and were modified when unsuccessful. In some cases these strategies were deliberate as the respondents sought out resources whilst in other cases the utilisation of a particular strategy was the result of a chance encounter.

Seek assistance through existing contacts

One option available to new arrivals would be to arrange a contact in Cape Town beforehand so as to have someone serve as a guide through the complex physical and social dynamics of the city. Ruffin tried this strategy, making contact with a Congolese friend who had arrived in South Africa after him and stayed with him in Pretoria but had since moved on to Cape Town. Ongoing contact with this friend suggested that greater employment possibilities existed in Cape Town. On arrival, however, his friend was not there to greet him at the station as arranged and his cell phone was switched off. Ruffin's

attempt at this strategy had failed and thus he adapted to the conditions by pursuing the strategy of seeking advice from strangers around him (see below).

In Cape Town, John had a contact that he believed would assist him. This contact was the former colleague of the Canadian national who had assisted John in Tanzania (see Chapter 2). With just a telephone number and the address of this contact, John's hopes of immediately meeting up with this contact were found to fail.

So I came here. I never knew anybody. But [the Canadian national] told me to reach Cape Town and there is someone he used to work with. But when I came, that person was nowhere to be seen. So when I arrived here I didn't know anybody. I just started from the police station. Buitenkant Street.

John was forced to modify his strategy and so sought assistance through a nearby police station (see below).

Formal sources of information

Another strategy available to new arrivals in Cape Town is to seek information through formal channels such as an information desk, customer services or police or other officials. At the time of my research, there were no obvious formal sources of information such as a general information desk or a police office on Cape Town train station. An office advertising 'information' was only for Metrorail enquiries. There was no tourist information providing maps of Cape Town or to suggest accommodation options.

John's failure to locate the contact he had been provided with in Tanzania saw him turn to a strategy that had been successful for him previously in Tanzania. When John had first arrived in Dar es Salaam, he had contacted the police who had then located fellow Ugandan nationals living in the city who assisted him with accommodation and in applying for asylum. This strategy had been relatively successful there and had resulted in him obtaining accommodation and food at one of the refugee camps in the west of that country. Now in Cape Town, John sought assistance through the Buitenkant police station. Unfortunately, the officers at Buitenkant police station took little responsibility for assisting John other than allowing him to sleep outside the station at night. John reflects, "I would just roam around during that time with my luggage. And go back to Buitenkant

Street". This was a second strategy that had failed for John and once again he had to modify his strategy.

Obtain information about possible NGO assistance before arrival

A third strategy utilised was to obtain information about refugee service providers before embarking on this leg of their journey and thus seek these out on arrival in Cape Town. Roger moved from Durban to Cape Town hoping to receive temporary accommodation for his family at The Ark night shelter in Westlake.²³ He thought that this would at least ensure that his family had a place to stay whilst he looked for a means to support them. Yet attempts to access this assistance were unsuccessful: "We didn't even stay one day or night. They chased us away immediately...They say that it was saturated. There was no place for us. And the police had to evacuate us" (Roger, interview, 23.05.2007). The night shelter was overwhelmed and did not have the resources to assist Roger and his family.

Roger's strategy had been shaped by his responsibility for his family but the failure of this strategy meant that Roger and his family became reliant on the police who had removed them from The Ark for assistance. Unlike John, Roger had not actively sought police assistance and unlike John's case, the police were active in assisting Roger and his family. Police from Kirstenhof police station provided the family with food and allowed them to stay at the police station.²⁴ The following day the police made an effort to obtain a more long term form of assistance for them.²⁵ Roger recalls:

The second night the police took us to different places. They didn't know about refugees so they were looking if we can get some shelter with an organisation that looks after refugees, which at the end they found.

Roger's wife Agathe and the children were thus accommodated at the Bonne Esperance shelter in Philippi, which caters for refugee women and children.²⁶ The organisation was also able to source accommodation for Roger for the night with a friend of a staff member.

²³ Westlake is situated about 30 kilometers from the centre of Cape Town.

²⁴ Kirstenhof is also situated about 30 kilometers from the centre of Cape Town. The Kirstenhof police station would service the Westlake area.

²⁵ Judging from the anecdotal evidence supplied by refugees, this is by no means a normal service from the South African Police Service but rather reflects the kindness of the particular officers involved.

²⁶ An area located on the outskirts of Cape Town.

Identify 'home people' and ask them for information/assistance

The most successful strategy - and most commonly used - was to hang around the station area trying to identify non-nationals and seeing who would assist them. Initial attempts usually concentrated on finding people who spoke the same language. Jean recalls being assisted at Cape Town station by people from Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC – all of whom speak (some) French. Simon sought out people who spoke French, Swahili or Lingala. For Jean and Simon this was primarily out of necessity as neither spoke any English at the time. The languages that Jean and Simon spoke on arrival in South Africa thus became important resources.

In a 1963 study on IsiXhosa-speaking migrants from rural areas moving to urban areas, Mayer derived the term 'home-people' for "people who are related to [one's] own 'people at home' in one way or another" (1963: 124). By seeking out people with whom the new arrival has some social connection, he is "protected from the trauma of plunging into an altogether unfamiliar social world" (*ibid*). For the respondents, finding a person who spoke the same language provided a number of potential shared identities on which to base a claim for assistance. All except John spoke French and finding a fellow French speaker could mean shared identities in terms of both being 'non-South Africans', being from the same region, possibly being from the same country, both being new arrivals and other such factors.

Ruffin deliberately sought out those speaking Lingala to ask how he might find assistance.²⁷ This was especially noteworthy as Ruffin hails from the eastern DRC where Swahili is more frequently spoken. Ruffin also speaks excellent French and English to the extent that he ran language schools in Mozambique and Malawi. For Ruffin then language was the key to identifying 'home-people'. Ruffin's focus on those speaking Lingala suggests an active strategy to invoke a sense of loyalty in those who might be in a position to assist him. Having been in Pretoria for three years prior to moving to Cape Town, Ruffin would thus have been aware that in Johannesburg, the large numbers of Congolese nationals in the city had resulted in a shared sense of Congolese-ness becoming secondary to closer language and 'ethnic' ties (Amisi and Ballard, 2005). Amisi and Ballard's (2005) research

²⁷ The language predominantly spoken in the western parts of the DRC including the capital of Kinshasa.

findings indicate that perceptions of 'common ethnicity' as the defining factor in the formation of relatively formalised networks of Congolese nationals was the result of such large numbers of Congolese nationals entering the country that shared nationality was no longer an effective basis for mobilisation. Their research (2005: 11) found that such 'ethnic' networks were highly organised as "Each group has a formal executive committee elected by the membership... Many of these groups also have constitutions, written by the executive but debated by the membership". Atam's study of Congolese networks in inner-city Johannesburg reflects similar findings where "Congolese refugees moved in tight-knit ethnic networks" (cited in Steinberg, 2005: 28). Atam found that there was no broader Congolese identity in Johannesburg that newcomers could call on for assistance. Ruffin's experience of this thus shaped his decision to search specifically for Lingala-speakers rather than Congolese nationals in general.

A key finding in my own research is that a number of the respondents noted how those whom they contacted for assistance immediately sought out people of the same nationality as the new arrival. Simon recalls:

Ya, I looked for [people speaking French, Swahili or Lingala] and asked them and said "I'm new people here" and they tried to get maybe people from my country because you know if you get people from your country, immediately you have to get something [assistance].

Simon's statement indicates a certainty he would find assistance from fellow Rwandan nationals. This perception was shaped by the information he received from other Rwandan nationals in Tanzania (see Chapter 2). Simon's expectations were proved right as he was provided with accommodation and found a job through a Rwandan national he was able to locate at a hair salon on his second day in Cape Town. Perceptions around solidarity amongst those from one's home country are also shared by new arrivals and some already settled in Cape Town. In this case, nationality is the key to identifying as 'home-people'.

Bosco too planned to find people he knew or anybody who could speak his language on arrival in Cape Town. He was fortunate to by chance encounter two young men speaking Kinyarwanda on Cape Town station as he arrived in Cape Town:²⁸

²⁸ The national language of Rwanda and very similar to Kirundi, which is spoken in neighbouring Burundi.

When we reached Cape Town it was the evening like 3 or 4 o'clock. When I was passing like this I heard young people who were speaking Kinyarwanda because there on Cape Town station people are speaking their languages. So I stopped them. They were surprised to see me and they don't know me. They took me to Muizenberg and I stayed there for a while.²⁹

This chance encounter with two fellow Rwandan nationals resulted in Bosco sharing their accommodation and accessing employment through their networks (see Chapter 4).

After John's unsuccessful attempts to locate his contact in Cape Town, he began to ask the people he met how he could obtain assistance:

You see when I was communicating with people they told me how you can get Ugandans. Some are doing business you know and they have some address. So I just got one business lady luckily who directed me to another business gentleman who then took me to Gugulethu and got me accommodation.

John was thus able to link up with fellow Ugandan nationals after two weeks of being in Cape Town.

For Simon, Bosco and John, as well as for many of those they approached for assistance, there were expectations of solidarity based on a shared country of origin. Ruffin too indicates that he had such expectations. For Simon, Bosco and John the case is somewhat different given that the populations and land mass of Rwanda and Uganda are far smaller than that of the DRC and that there are far fewer Rwandan and Ugandan nationals in South Africa than there are Congolese (UNHCR, 2006: table 9). There is thus a greater chance of shared networks for those from Rwanda than for those from the DRC. This could also be a factor in Simon's certainty that "If you get people from your country, immediately you have to get something" (Simon, interview, 16.05.2007). The networking of the respondents supports the findings of the National Refugee Baseline Study conducted by CASE (2003: 77) that newly arrived asylum seekers generally sought accommodation with "people with whom they had some affinity or familiarity, be they friends, people from the same country or relatives". Out of CASE's sample of 1502, 49%

²⁹ Muizenberg is a seaside area about 40 kilometers from the centre of Cape Town and is known to have a large population of non-nationals resident there.

said they stayed with refugee friends that were already known to them. Another 13% stayed with people from the same country of origin who they did not know prior to their arrival, and another 13% stayed with relatives. Of CASE's sample of 1502, approximately 1126 people stated that they stayed with people with whom they had some existing connection prior to arrival either through existing social networks, family ties, or by drawing on notions of kinship with those of the same country of origin. The remaining 25% of the sample thus initially stayed at a shelter, a church, a hotel, outside in the open or on the street or other places such as police stations, bus stations or train stations where no network was in place to assist them. This data further illustrates the resourcefulness of refugees in securing assistance for themselves in the absence of refugee camps or availability at shelters.

The use of different strategies employed by the six respondents indicates the resourcefulness of refugees in the absence of direct service provision. The fluidity with which strategies were changed when earlier strategies failed also indicates the resilience of refugees. Having discussed such strategies with the respondents I sought to identify other non-nationals that could serve as a resource for new arrivals at Cape Town station.

'Hanging-out' at Cape Town station provided evidence of a large number of non-nationals on the station. On each day, more than 30 non-nationals who appeared primarily from central Africa according to dress styles and the French I overheard were in the vicinity of the station with some there on a temporary basis such as meeting somebody or catching a train whilst others were there to ply their trade at one of the informal markets. There is a hair salon staffed by non-nationals situated in the middle of the entrance hall to the station. At the time of my research there was a 'Community Chat' informal telephone stand staffed by a Somali national situated outside the nearest exit of the station to the street.³⁰ Through the exit across the hall I often saw groups of smartly-dressed men speaking French and the stands at the adjoining informal market were all staffed by people who appeared to be non-nationals according to their appearance, including hair style and style of dress.³¹ A second market next to the bus station vending items such as clothing, shoes and small electronic goods appeared to be staffed and frequented by a number of non-

³⁰ An informal telephone stand is a common feature of many markets throughout eastern and southern Africa. It consists of a table with a number of telephone sets that can be used by members of the public at various call rates.

³¹ I have been able to observe the different hair and dress styles of the different nationalities I have assisted during my time at UCT Law Clinic.

nationals judging by their appearances and the languages I heard spoken. In addition, a formal telephone stall at the side of the market advertised cut-price calls to Brazzaville, Congo thus suggesting many non-nationals utilise their services. Further away, but also in the immediate vicinity is the market on the Grand Parade which, again at the time of my research, was staffed by a number of people speaking French as well as others who appeared to be non-nationals again judging by styles of dress.

There are thus plenty of potential resources available to those newly arrived in Cape Town. There are many people of different nationalities speaking different languages who can be asked for information about a possible place to stay or services available for newcomers. This is not to suggest that no information services are required for newly arrived non-nationals. Instead this indicates the resourcefulness of the respondents in finding their own solution to their situation rather than all relying on assistance from an organisation or the South African government. Whilst the respondents did show resourcefulness and resilience the difficulties that some faced and the role NGOs can play in providing 'safety nets' is clear from the following evidence.

Struggles on Arrival

Not every respondent was successful in obtaining assistance on arrival. For John, his initial days in Cape Town consisted of a struggle to obtain information and access some form of assistance. Newly arrived in South Africa and in new city unable to contact the only person with whom he had any connection, this was an immensely difficult time for John. In describing his initial experience in Cape Town, John reflects

I was surviving by God's grace, you know. I didn't have any income. I didn't have any money. I didn't have anybody to give me any money. I was just surviving by God's grace. Sometimes it's difficult to know how you... Sometimes when I sit down today and I flashback, I wonder how did I survive? It's tormenting actually.... I remember when I arrived here in Cape Town. It was very very windy. You couldn't even move with your luggage. The wind was blowing you back. But you are hungry. You are confused. You are traumatised. You feel... You feel lost, you know? And it's not like that situation is just for a day. It's not going to end tomorrow and you even don't know when it will end.

Although refugees may arrive in South Africa hoping to find safety, the reality is that the trauma is not yet over. Here the trauma experienced before and during the flight can be exacerbated by the trauma of having to fend for one's self. A colleague working at a local trauma clinic told me that refugee clients are often not ready to talk about past traumas because they are dealing urgently with present traumas in securing essentials such as food and accommodation.

It proved difficult for John to meet fellow Ugandan nationals due to the lower numbers of Ugandan nationals than Rwandan or Congolese nationals in South Africa. Those that John met were willing to assist him but were themselves not yet settled and none held regular employment. Given their own struggles, John was able to play a useful role in being an extra person to contribute towards their struggles for group income. After a stay of eight months in their shared accommodation in Gugulethu the group was evicted when the landlord failed to pay his bond.³²

The owner of the building was not servicing the bond so the bank had to throw us out during the winter of 2005. And we had to sleep out for three days. In Gugulethu. As foreigners we were sleeping on the streets of Gugulethu in winter. For three days you know... Oh it was terrible you know. You couldn't sleep. You just have to sit. Because you become very vulnerable at that time. Any person can do anything to you.

Security was a constant concern whilst living in Gugulethu – something also experienced by Jean and both he and John felt especially vulnerable as 'foreigners'. John and two of the other Ugandans were then able to obtain another room, also in Gugulethu. Yet without regular income they continued to struggle: "We are paying for it R300 per month and we were sharing it three people. And it was very difficult for us to afford it. Three people in a R300 room. It was still terrible for us to afford it." For John then, his initial time in Cape Town consisted largely of struggle, and assistance during this time from government or an NGO would have been welcomed. Chapter 4 details how John did approach an NGO for assistance during this time but eventually gave up waiting for their help.

NGOs as a Safety Net

³² A township around 20 kilometers outside of Cape Town where the majority of residents are African and accommodation is likely to be cheaper.

The evidence presented thus far illustrates that most of the respondents were able to secure accommodation and income without the assistance of government or NGOs whilst one received no help and struggled. The following section presents evidence that there is a valuable role for NGOs to play in providing a safety net for those who require it on arrival in Cape Town. Prior to starting this research, I had perceived that the fundamental challenge facing refugee service providers was to inform people of their services with my key assumption being that all refugees are reliant on such services. Yet such services all too often fail to meet the needs of those who desperately need assistance.³³ I had also therefore perceived of refugees as 'needy' and helpless and fully reliant on service provision and this research was crucial in recognising the resourcefulness and resilience that refugees do display.

Both Roger and Jean arrived in Cape Town with families and first sought to secure accommodation for their families. Jean followed the same strategy as Simon in asking people around Cape Town station where he could find accommodation. Unfortunately, the presence of his family made people reluctant to offer them accommodation at their own lodgings given their limited space. From this experience, it seems that people were far more able and willing to accommodate one person on a temporary basis but accommodating a family with two small children is difficult, given that many refugees live in single rooms or small flats and usually share accommodation with others.

Jean was thus directed to the Bonne Esperance shelter in Philippi that caters for refugee women and young children. Whilst his wife and children were accommodated there, he slept outside near a petrol station for the first night and was then directed to the Cape Town Refugee Centre by other French-speaking non-nationals and there he was assisted in securing a place at a shelter, where he stayed for three weeks.³⁴

With his family's accommodation secure, Jean was free to begin networking. He spent the days walking around Cape Town asking non-nationals working in car parks where he could find work and was eventually referred to an individual who runs a number of car watch services and was able to get work in Constantia Village. Through this work he learned that a co-worker was moving out of a house in Gugulethu, which he then moved

³³ This theme will be discussed further in the next chapter.

into with his family. Having experienced security problems in the area, Jean informed all those he knew and worked with that he was looking for alternative accommodation:

[The person vacating the house] was come to work. I was giving notice to all workers I'm looking for a place because in Gugulethu they catch me and they want to shoot me. So I was giving notice if anyone found a place for me I'm going to move.

Through this network, someone moving out of a backyard flat in Wynberg contacted him at his work.

Roger had also moved to Cape Town with his family, banking on finding accommodation at The Ark night shelter but was told it was full. As a result the family spent their first night in Cape Town at the local police station and the following day the police learnt about Bonne Esperance shelter and were able to find accommodation for Roger's wife and children there. The staff of Bonne Esperance contacted the head of another refugee organisation that accommodated Roger at his house for a night before securing a place for Roger through his own networks at a house rented by Red Cross in Gugulethu.

At the same time as he was searching for accommodation, Roger was also networking and asking questions of the other non-nationals he met. Through other non-nationals he met at The Ark and later in Gugulethu, he learnt about building sites where one could wait for casual construction jobs. After not having any success at a Westlake site, he was able to get work on a site in Woodstock during his first week in Cape Town.

In Roger and Jean's cases, the shelters played the role of a safety net providing a secure base for their wives and children whilst freeing the respondents to explore opportunities for income and accommodation. In this way, the shelters provided much the same function as the refugee camps in northern Kenya as described by a Somali friend of mine. He suggested that men could leave their families there secure in the knowledge that their families would receive food and health care whilst they ventured to other countries seeking out income-generating opportunities. The men could then arrange for the women and children to join them in the new country once they had become established.

³⁴ The Cape Town Refugee Centre is a UNHCR implementing partner providing social assistance including assistance with accommodation to refugees.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the immediate responses of the respondents to arriving in a new city and needing to find a place to spend the night. In contrast to the image of 'helpless' refugees reliant on assistance as portrayed in the media and by some refugee service providers, the respondents were extremely resourceful in securing accommodation for themselves and thus making the initial steps towards settling in Cape Town. The respondents employed a variety of strategies to obtain information and find a place to stay and demonstrated their flexibility and determination by adapting their strategies when initial attempts failed. This is a stark contrast to the notions of refugees being reliant on external interventions and creating a drain on resources.

In contrast to the stereotypes of refugees as helpless and dependent, this chapter has illustrated the resourcefulness and resilience of refugees in the face of the confusion and difficulties of arriving in a new place without money or contacts. Rather than waiting for assistance from formal sources, each of the respondents formed his own plan and was flexible to adapt this when necessary. At the same time it is important to note that all of the respondents would indeed have benefited from the provision of assistance on arrival in Cape Town. John and Jean spent nights sleeping outside before obtaining assistance whilst Roger and Bosco were somewhat more fortunate in their initial arrangements. Simon and Ruffin also relied on the kindness of strangers for initial assistance. From these respondents' stories, and many others related to me in the course of fieldwork, it seems clear that information at arrival points and accommodation are two areas where assistance from government or NGOs could assist refugees on arrival in Cape Town, greatly alleviating their already traumatised lives.

Networking and the ability to link up with 'home-people' was a major determinant of who was able to secure accommodation quickly. Whilst some of the respondents were highly resourceful and were thus able to fend for themselves, others struggled to obtain assistance. In two cases the presence of shelters providing accommodation for women and children played a vital role, allowing the men to network and secure income for the family. The evidence presented thus points towards the need for a cautious balance between service provision to new arrivals and over-provision or imposition that would stifle the ability of individuals to form their own networks and linkages. It is clear that some

people are certainly in need of greater access to services such as shelter provision, at least until such time as they have been able to obtain access to income or else tap into social networks that can provide them with some assistance.

Chapter 4: Stealing Our Livelihoods? Challenging Perceptions that Refugees are a Threat to the Economy

'Refugees' in South Africa have been popularly perceived as taking up scarce resources intended for South Africans and/or as stealing jobs from South Africans (Sichone, 2006; Landau et al, 2005). In 2004, Amos Masondo the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg stated that "While migrancy contributes to the rich tapestry of the cosmopolitan city, it also places a severe strain on employment levels, housing and public services" (in Landau et al, 2005: 6). Migrants are therefore conceptualised as using up resources.

To what extent do such statements reflect reality? Being able to access legal documents, particularly an identity document, so as to claim social welfare or obtain formal employment, is key to accessing any form of government assistance in South Africa - for South Africans and non-nationals. This chapter examines the difficulties refugees encounter in obtaining such documents from the DHA and thus the difficulties of accessing formal employment or social welfare. Obtaining social assistance from NGOs is shown to be equally challenging. In the general absence of government or NGO assistance, the refugees must rely primarily on networking and even chance to create opportunities for themselves. By so doing they are neither usurping South Africa's resources nor competing directly with South Africans for formal jobs. Indeed, their resourcefulness belies the popular stereotype.

Obstacles to legalising their status

Newcomers' attempts at accessing employment or services in Cape Town are also not helped by suspicion regarding the validity of refugee and asylum seeker documentation. Chapters 1 and 3 indicated that the South African government provides little to no direct social assistance at present. In addition, many services still require the presentation of a green South African ID book.³⁵ Accessing the Refugee Reception Offices to apply for asylum, renew a permit, appeal against the rejection of an asylum application or apply for a refugee ID is one of the greatest challenges facing refugees in South Africa (CoRMSA,

2007). The recent events surrounding access to the Refugee Reception Office located on the Foreshore in central Cape Town have been well documented in the media. A Zimbabwean solidarity group has maintained an active presence outside the office and has reported a number of abuses by DHA officials, building security personnel, and the South African Police Services (De Vries, 2007a; De Vries, 2007b).

At the time of my research, things were little better. The poor performance and lack of access to the Refugee Reception Office had resulted in the Legal Resources Centre instituting legal proceeding against the DHA.³⁶ The case was put on hold given the legal proceedings against the DHA by Wits Law Clinic over the same issue in Gauteng.³⁷ The Kiliko case has subsequently been re-opened and the DHA has to illustrate to the court significant improvement in the functioning of its office by December 2008.

Research conducted at the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office in 2002 described people queuing outside the office from 6pm the night before and queues of up to 550 people outside the office on certain days (Sterken, 2002). Refugees would not leave the queue for fear of losing their place and therefore people would not eat for up to 12 hours. DHA officials during this time "had very little patience with refugees, and they regularly shouted or spoke condescendingly to refugees in a degrading manner" (Sterken, 2002: 42). Officials used inconsistent criteria for permission to enter so that the majority of those queuing outside were not assisted and were very frustrated by their lack of access. They were also not issued with documents to prove they had attended the DHA office and were thus liable for arrest and deportation. Little concern was shown for sick people queuing outside – for example, the report described a Congolese national with serious open wounds who was forced to queue for four nights and still was not granted access and was thus unable to obtain hospital care (Sterken, 2002).

Unfortunately little had changed by the time of my research. During the two weeks in April 2007 I spent observing the queues outside the Refugee Reception Office I noted the same chaos in the queuing system. I also witnessed a senior DHA official push a refugee he considered was standing too close to the door, with excessive force. When the refugee protested, the official confronted him aggressively with the support of two security guards

³⁵ The maroon Refugee ID book is very different in appearance to the green South African ID book.

³⁶ Kiliko and Others v Minister of Home Affairs and Others 2006 (4) SA 114 (C)

with batons. There was little the refugee could do but back away. Similar behaviour by the same official was reported by members of the research team I led outside the office in early May (see below).

During these two weeks, the Refugee Reception Office granted no access to newly arrived asylum seekers and therefore the large number of individuals waiting outside the office without documents were left vulnerable to arrest and deportation. After these two weeks, I began to work at the Refugee Reception Office in an official capacity for a further two weeks leading a research team (see Chapter 1). I thus attended the office every week day from 30th April to 11th May 2007 from at least 6.30am until 9am and on each day had at least one student to assist me. During these two weeks, the team recorded the names of 932 newly arrived asylum seekers without documents waiting outside the office to be issued with permits. Not one was assisted during this period as no new applications were being processed and at least two of the individuals whose names we recorded were arrested and threatened with deportation. After UCT Law Clinic's intervention they were eventually released.

During this time, the team assisted in ensuring more orderly queues and found that those outside were far calmer when informed whether or not they would be assisted on that day. I created signs for the officials to guide people into one of the five queues they had set up and provided translations into French and Somali. These signs were not used beyond the first day when I had personally put them up. My suggestions about utilising the ropes and poles within the DHA office to separate the queues to provide for a more orderly system outside the office were never explored. Despite being requested by the manager of the Refugee Reception Office to bring any elderly or sick people to their attention, when I brought a pregnant woman to the attention of the manager and senior officials, they asked "How pregnant is she?" and suggested that she return closer to her delivery date. My suggestion that she would need to access health services to ensure the health of the foetus was completely ignored.

There have also been widespread allegations of corruption. The Cape Times carried a story shortly after my research period detailing the experience of a reporter who spoke Shona and did an undercover report at the Refugee Reception Office pretending to be an

³⁷ *Tafira and Others v Minister of Home Affairs and Others* 2006 12960/06

asylum seeker (Nzapheza, 2007). He was asked to pay R800 to be issued with a Section 22 asylum seeker's permit by corrupt officials.

Similar challenges were experienced by John in applying for asylum. John applied for refugee status while in Johannesburg. He describes his experience at the Refugee Reception Office there:

I remember the fight that I went through to get my asylum seekers' permit you know. There was a lot of fighting. I was forewarned. Someone told me, "you're going to war". There is no peace there. Some people punch they lose their teeth. So if you go like mama's boy you will not get a permit. You have to go prepared for a war. So I went and I knew the repercussions of not having a permit. You will be arrested every day by the police. You will be accused in police stations. So I learnt through my experience... I didn't want anybody to just come and say now again I'm going to give you this kind of treatment because I was very violent at that time. So when we went there I remember there was a very big riot there. People were fighting. They even broke the door, the Home Affairs officers because there were so many people. I don't know. 100 people all pushing. Now its survival of the fittest. The women are knocked over. The ones who have children, they will never get a permit because there is not any order there. I remember they had the Flying Squad because the riot was so big. The flying squad came and we were down in the basement and it was hot. People were collapsing. The Flying Squad came and they cut the doors. And they had to bring even fans to ventilate the place because people were collapsing. That is the day when I got the appointment to come back at this time and get your permit. But it was a big big experience for me. Its one of those things I recall when I reached South Africa. It was not a simple welcome...

John's rendition clearly indicates his desperation at not having a permit and his awareness of its consequences. In such circumstances those that can find a way to get hold of documentation will do so. Some are disadvantaged by either not having money to bribe officials, or push to the front of a queue. As John states, his arrival in South Africa was not a welcoming experience.

Gaining access to the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office therefore remains a great challenge. Refugees' ill treatment by officials there is likely to shape their perception right at the start that they are not welcome in South Africa and to hamper any attempts to access formal employment. Those who have formal qualifications cannot engage the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to recognise these until they have refugee

papers. The need to report regularly to a Refugee Reception Office to renew one's asylum seeker permit also means taking time off work, thus jeopardising one's job. The challenges around access to documents therefore means that refugees cannot compete equally with South Africans for jobs. Refugees can also not access any services to which they may be entitled until they have such documents. This is initial evidence that refugees neither 'use up' South Africa's resources nor 'steal' jobs from South Africans.

The following section explores the possibility of NGO assistance for refugees. If NGOs are providing broad services to refugees where no such services are available for South Africans, this could indeed serve as a source of tension and support the perception that refugees are being provided with more resources at the expense of South Africans. However, the evidence presented in the following section will illustrate that NGO assistance is limited and difficult to access.

NGO assistance³⁸

In addition to facing severe challenges in accessing the documents necessary to become self-reliant through employment, refugees also face severe challenges in accessing the limited services provided by NGOs. The UNHCR funds social assistance partners in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town to provide assistance with accommodation, health care and education as well as social relief in the form of food vouchers where necessary. In Cape Town, the partner is the Cape Town Refugee Centre (CTRC) (formerly known as the Cape Town Refugee Forum – hence often referred to as 'The Forum'). With only one main office in Cape Town to assist thousands of refugees and asylum seekers, the limitations of such service can be foreseen. However, other factors also inhibit the access of refugees to these services.

Rigid appointment systems

³⁸ It is necessary for me to preface this section by stating that the concerns raised about the CTRC here have been raised about the other social assistance partners in the other cities. The sense is that there is just little assistance being provided generally to refugees.

John, as discussed in Chapter 3, was in a most difficult situation of struggling to obtain secure accommodation and income for a long period. He tried to obtain assistance from CTRC at one stage when he was particularly desperate. Having heard about the CTRC after some time in Cape Town, he approached their office for assistance:

When I went there, I really wanted immediate help. I went there on a Thursday I remember. When I tried to go to their office they told me no, they could not receive me. I should go back, make a call and make an appointment. But I didn't have money to make a call. But when I was going I found somebody who gave me a phone to call. When I called them I told them my problem. They said no they handle refugees on Wednesdays. I must come back next Wednesday. But the money which had taken me there on that Thursday, I had borrowed it from somebody knowing maybe I'll get help. Now I was going back to my friend saying we didn't get anything from there, I have to go back next Wednesday. And then they just talk to you and tell you they say come back next week. So I just gave up. I don't want those games.

John's situation was fairly desperate by the time he approached the CTRC for help. However, the organisation's rigid appointment system was a serious deterrent and John gave up trying to access their assistance.

Simon had never approached refugee organisations for assistance. Although he had heard positive reports about some, he was pessimistic about the prospects of assistance:

We make our struggling ourselves. Maybe you're going to get into that question, I don't know. ... but South Africa is only going to give you the paper, nothing else. Because you can say the Forum [CTRC], you're going there. It is the refugee organisation. But the people when you're going there, they promise you they promise you. 'Come in tomorrow, come in tomorrow'. So how you're going to eat? 'Come in tomorrow' How're you going to sleep if you come in tomorrow? And then tomorrow you get there and they say come in tomorrow again. Everyday is tomorrow. Everyday is tomorrow. So try to make struggling yourself. And at the end of the story you hear people say, no my friend don't go there. They can't give you anything. Struggling yourself is the best way...

Simon echoes John's sentiments about being told repeatedly to come back on a certain day. Again the issue of communication is pertinent but in addition, Simon had heard that despite lots of people waiting for services, very few were assisted:

For me, I can't know why, but all the people say so when they going there. And then you're going there and there is 20 people and they took only two people. They help only two

people of 20 per day. Other ones they are sitting when you come there and they say coming soon, coming soon. But they don't then do anything ...

These experiences reinforce the perception that South Africa, whether government or NGOs, does very little to provide for refugees so that refugees have little option but to rely on themselves to cater for their own needs.

Limited resources

Jean too struggled to access assistance for his family. He outlined the lack of service provider expertise to cater to his family's specific needs as well as the limited nature of NGO assistance:

About refugee organisations ...To be honest, it's just we don't have somewhere to go. Because myself, I have told you about my situation about which child I have, about my wife who stays at home all the time to look after that child. They give you help to eat but how many days? And then they were giving her some vouchers for two months and after that they can't help any more. And when I go to ask them about school for that child for which they say must go looking for the school. When I find the school they give me problems. They can't pay. Like they say I must put that one in a crèche. They were going to pay for it. When I finish putting on a crèche, they won't pay -The Forum [CTRC]. All the time I have a lot of letters here. The teachers say I must pay a lot of money immediately so last time I go there. They say they can't pay all mine. So I say ok I'm working, let me pay half and pay half for me. They say yes. After that I pay my half every month but now the teacher he sent total or their half which he say I must pay. They did speak to the teacher and promised they going to give him money but they didn't do it.

In addition to the limited nature of services there is also an issue of NGOs making promises and not following through on these. Jean told me separately that it was a NGO social worker who had promised to pay his child's crèche fees but the director of the organisation refused to release the necessary funds. As if to outline his desperation, Jean then said softly:

If I don't do it, actually they going to stop my child from going to school. Because I have a lot of letters warning saying I must pay money immediately. Because every month I pay my money, my half. But they never pay...

It is clear that the specific refugee service providers do not have the capacity to investigate each case thoroughly and as such it would be useful to network and liaise with the social workers funded by the Department of Social Development.

Ruffin, who runs a new community-based organisation catering for refugees, reports being informed that many people are disappointed with the social services being provided to refugees. He informed me further that many people who require assistance are 'chased away' from certain service providers. This may again reflect the huge demand for very limited services.

There is no doubt that the social services provided to refugees in Cape Town are sorely lacking in terms of resource capacity to ensure that all those with acute needs are catered for. Coupled with the difficulties in accessing documentation, this further reduces the number of options available to refugees in Cape Town.

Type of assistance provided

John's final general comment on the nature of service provision to refugees in Cape Town was that the type of assistance provided was not geared towards making people independent:

I think the service provision is lacking in a way that is not full at all. For me I think people should be able to fend for themselves. Sustainability is very important. And people should be given skills that will enable them to survive. If you're training somebody, like what we are doing here - Business Management. Many refugees are doing business. So if you train them how to handle their money, how they can open an account, how they can balance their books, how they can know their profits... I think that one is good because these are skills that are required when you do business, computers. There is a lot of understanding today on the Internet. There is a lot of information that can help someone on the Internet. And these are tools of communication. So those are some of the empowering skills you can give someone...

The type of assistance provided to refugees is thus critical in aiming to ensure that refugees are able to earn their own income rather than rely on handouts from organisations limited by their minimal funding. Whilst the current situation presents

challenges given the general need for skills training in South Africa, it is also wise advice considering that such skills would also be valuable for regional development should refugees be able to return home at some stage in the future.

It appears that many refugees struggle to access the limited assistance provided by NGOs. Rigid appointment systems mean that desperate people cannot access immediate assistance and the limited resources of NGOs mean that they cannot assist all in need. In addition, NGO assistance is not always appropriate as it does not always aim at making individuals self-reliant. For example, the provision of food vouchers to refugees in need can be a valuable intervention but is not sustainable. Thus in addition to being marginalised by a lack of government provision, refugees are also largely marginalised by NGOs. Without direct government or NGO assistance, it cannot be convincingly argued that refugees 'use up' South Africa's resources. In the absence of adequate and appropriate support, how do refugees generate an income? The following section explores the way in which the six respondents created opportunities for themselves. Through networking and chance encounters they were generally able to create opportunities for themselves where they were not competing directly with South Africans.

Networking and Chance

As discussed in Chapter 3, a number of respondents demonstrated excellent networking skills on arrival in Cape Town. It is these skills that have largely been responsible for their survival during their stay in Cape Town.

John had worked in the formal economy in Uganda where he had held a highly respected position in the national fisheries department. His skills would be an asset to any country. Instead John found himself on the margins of society on arrival in Cape Town, sharing accommodation with other Ugandan nationals in overcrowded conditions. He had to adopt informal, sometimes illegal, means of day to day living. His strategies around transport illustrate:

When you move on the trains you share a card. Like somebody comes to Cape Town and if he gets somebody who is coming back to Gugulethu he gives him the card to bring for the train ticket. That's how we are doing things.

The absence of formal structures of assistance meant that John had to adopt such informal and illegal strategies in order to survive.

In the informal environment where refugees attempt to access employment opportunities, certain well-positioned individuals can play important roles as gatekeepers. During the time I have known Jean I have been continually impressed by his positive attitude despite the difficulty of his position in taking care of his son who has severe mental health challenges. Jean had spent time in Pretoria and knew of some of the employment opportunities available to refugees by the time he arrived in Cape Town. He walked around asking non-nationals working as car guards in various car parks where he could find work. Eventually he was directed to Mr Simons, who at the time was in charge of a large number of car guard businesses in a number of car parks.³⁹ Jean describes his interaction with Mr Simons:

He said come tomorrow at N1 city. It was not easy for me to find N1 city so I try to ask where is the place and I go to meet him. I was even can't speak English. When I get there he give me a hard time but later he give me a job.

Given the limited resources available to refugees, gatekeepers such as Mr Simons are therefore crucially significant in the search for employment. Yet Mr Simons was not initially willing to employ Jean:

So he asked me, what do you come for? I said I come for the job. He said I don't have job. I said but yesterday I phoned you and you said you had a job. He said yes I have a job but I don't have job for short people. I tell him yes, I know I'm short but I have the power to work. And I have family to look after. He said sorry I don't have a job for you. I said please man because I have a child who is sick. He said he was concerned about my English because I didn't have a chance to speak English. He ask the supervisor, William from N1 City if he has any space there and he said he doesn't have space. And he phone this guy here Theo in Constantia and he say he must get a place for me because I am going to work there.

The power of such gatekeepers to provide or deny access to work opportunities is critical and they can (and do) choose to deny access according to whim. The exercise of power displayed by Mr Simons made Jean immediately aware of the precarious nature of his employment and determined to adhere to the rules to keep it. Whilst relaying this story,

³⁹ Name has been changed.

Jean became very quiet, for quite a few minutes. This was a huge contrast to the vibrant and energetic personality he usually displayed. To me this felt as if, in relating the incident, he was now confronting his own powerlessness in this specific relationship.

Although having a means of income, Jean continued to network with the customers he met during his work as a car guard at Constantia Village. Eventually, by being on the lookout, through a chance encounter he was able to meet the owner of a shoe shop that would lead to his employment as a sales representative:

I was liking to talk for the customers and one of my customers was the boss for the company which I'm working for [now]. They have also a shoe shop in Constantia and all the time when he come I was always liking to take care of my customer. And one day he tell me that "Come here. How much do you get paid?" I tell him I don't get paid we get tips. He said "How much?" I said we have no set amounts. It is different everyday. You can meet a friend who can give you R500 one time. Once my friend from America she did give me R3000 one day. I say you can't know how much you can make. R50, R40, R100, R200, R300 a day - it depends on the day. You have no exact amount. He said, "If I give you a job, you can do it?" I say "Yes". And then I tell him it must be a permanent job because I can't leave this work to take another work. He said fine he's going to make me permanent. And I tell him before I go he must give me my contract. He go and decide how much to make, how much I must work. I started from 2650 but now I'm going for 3400 or 3500 [per month].

Jean now has access to steady income through this employment but as his wife is not working the family is reliant on his income. This seems a source of much frustration for him. His frustrations were clearly evident at the end of our interview and I was very uncomfortable about the way in which he was talking to his wife. She speaks little to no English and spends her days taking care of their mentally challenged son inside their damp poorly lit room behind their landlord's house. She is in a position of very little power given her lack of language ability and the fact that she was very young when she fled Rwanda and thus has arrived in South Africa without skills – further evidence of the drawbacks of refugee camps.

Yet Jean's perseverance in networking has provided the family with some successes. Through this – and chance - he met a generous couple from the US during his work at Constantia Village car park who assisted him financially and in securing temporary

treatment for his son at the Lentegeur Psychiatric Hospital. Unfortunately such assistance can only be limited and the couple has returned to the U.S. When I last contacted Jean in August, his younger son had returned home from the hospital and had no access to health care. I contacted a local NGO and they agreed to assess the case to try and assist. I passed this information on to Jean but two months later I was informed by the NGO that they had had no contact from Jean. It seems that Jean has largely lost faith in the ability of organisations to assist him, given the broken promises made by the NGO he previously dealt with.

Roger also relied on networking hoping for the intervention of chance. Fellow non-nationals he met during his initial days in Cape Town informed him of the possibility of obtaining part-time work at building sites across the city. Having been unsuccessful at the first site he approached, he persisted and found work on a site close to central Cape Town. With his wife and children accommodated by the Bonne Esperance shelter, Roger was flexible and moved from building site to building site wherever there was employment, and was sometimes able to find accommodation on the building site.

During this time, Roger and his wife Agathe attended a Catholic church on a regular basis and through this met a doctor who, learning that Roger did not have formal accommodation, invited him to look after his surgery after hours and paid him to do so. The doctor then also identified a house for them to rent as Agathe had already overstayed the allotted time at the shelter. This chance encounter with the doctor then led to Roger's employment as a driver for a Catholic NGO, which the doctor had arranged through his own family members. When the NGO became aware that Roger lived far from their premises, they offered him accommodation at their office in Athlone near central Cape Town. He was then able to move his family there too and his wife Agathe is currently the caretaker of the NGO's premises.

Social networks and chance encounters had again proved key factors in Roger securing a stable income and accommodation. His utilisation of the information provided by fellow non-nationals and his positioning of himself at the Catholic church had presented him with a chance encounter with the doctor who was then able to utilise his own resources and networks and provide access to more stable employment and accommodation for Roger and his family.

Religious sites were also important for Simon. At the mosque he attended he met a fellow Rwandan national who helped him gain more formalised employment at a large security firm. As these examples show, religious organisations or sites of prayer are accessible institutions that offer networking opportunities that can lead to significant improvement in the lives of refugees.

Social networking

Simon's networking was primarily with other non-nationals. He was able to find work at different car parks through fellow Rwandan nationals who alerted him when such opportunities arose. Simon described his networking:

You know if you start working you have to be sure if there are other friends or other guys who speak your language - you talk to them. You make them friends. So you have to know all the information about them.

Most car guards at the car parks where Simon worked were Rwandan nationals who provided Simon with access to a broad social network of Rwandans. A further site for networking for him was the Cape Town Refugee Reception Office. "I met people at Home Affairs. "Ah, you are here also? Take my number. I'm staying here. I can come to visit you". Something like that..." (Simon, interview, 16.05.2007).

Bosco was able to tap into the social networks of the two young men with whom he lived. Through Rwandan friends of theirs he was able to find a job working as a car guard in the parking lot at the upmarket Constantia Village. The vast majority of those I have met at this parking lot have been from Rwanda with a few from Burundi, including some who have only recently arrived in the country and speak little English. Once Bosco started work at the parking lot he too was able to develop further social contacts. He met Jean who informed him that low cost accommodation was available where he resided. Given the inability of most new arrivals to communicate in English, networking through 'homeboys' is the most practical way to find work and employers are also more likely to employ friends/acquaintances of their staff if the existing staff have proven reliable and trustworthy.

Ruffin, like Jean, took to walking the streets of Cape Town looking for opportunities and asking fellow Congolese nationals if they knew of any. In his second week he found himself in Green Point and stopped at the McDonalds for a drink. Here he met a Congolese security guard and asked him how he got a job there. The employees he was then referred to indicated that there were no positions available but on leaving, he witnessed the security guard having an altercation with the manager as the security guard had apparently not been at work the previous day. As the security guard could not speak English, Ruffin intervened as a translator. The manager was impressed with his conduct, took his details and the next day gave him a job as a security guard. It seems that Ruffin was given the job of the security guard whom he had tried to assist. When chatting to Ruffin about this, he showed no regret for taking advantage of someone else's plight as the other Congolese national's misfortune opened an opportunity at a time when Ruffin needed to find employment. Ruffin too thus attempted to network and was fortunate that a chance encounter presented him with an employment opportunity.

Despite evidence of solidarity between refugees in the cases of Simon and Bosco, who were both greatly assisted by fellow refugees, it is difficult to argue that there is a general sense of refugee solidarity. Given the scarcity of unskilled employment opportunities in Cape Town it is difficult to suggest that a person placed in Ruffin's position would feel solidarity for a fellow Congolese national he had only just met – and thus refuse to take his new acquaintance's job.

There is a far stronger case for suggesting that greater degrees of solidarity occur amongst those nationalities whose numbers are more limited in South Africa such as the Rwandan nationals in Simon's and Bosco' cases. This is supported by the evidence from Amisi and Ballard (2005) that suggests greater degrees of Congolese solidarity used to take place when there were fewer Congolese nationals in South Africa.

Conclusion

The evidence from the six respondents indicates that they were each responsible for creating opportunities that generated an income. Far from accessing government assistance, and in the general absence of social assistance from NGOs, they applied their

networking skills, hoped for chance encounters with individuals who might assist them and maximised those opportunities when they arose. Such strategies were the key to success for most. The absence of formal social assistance from the government and the challenges in obtaining the necessary documents from the Refugee Reception Office means that refugees are disadvantaged in accessing formal employment or services for which identity documents are needed. NGO assistance is limited and many struggle to access their services due to the rigid appointment systems in place. When such services can be accessed, these are not often aimed at assisting refugees become self-reliant. The evidence presented in this chapter therefore illustrates that refugees do not generally 'use up' South Africa's resources nor do they 'steal' jobs from South Africans. Rather, refugees generally create their own opportunities.

Chapter 5: 'Home'-less: Deciding to Stay or Leave South Africa

Common stereotypes suggest that all non-South African migrants (especially black Africans) who come to South Africa plan to stay in the country indefinitely. Such perceptions have been fuelled by statements such as Mbeki's decree that South Africans will have to learn to live with the growing number of Zimbabweans in the country (Webb, 2007). In a country where concerns and competition over resources are rife, such statements trigger fears of increased competition and diminishing resources. Fears of non-nationals living in the country indefinitely also appear to step up immigration raids, perhaps in the belief that people will remain in South Africa unless forced to leave. This has led to troubling behaviour by Immigration officials such as launching a provincial campaign to deport those without legal documents at a time when the DHA has committed itself to resolving the issues of access to the Refugee Reception Offices (see De Vries, 2007c), as well the complicity of Immigration officials with police in the recent raid on the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg.

These perceptions of non-South African migrants intending to stay in South Africa indefinitely are linked to the beliefs (a) that non-nationals are primarily drawn to South Africa because of its resources (see Chapter 2), and (b) that the resources are more attractive than 'home'. Were resources not so scarce, the presence of non-nationals in South Africa would likely attract much less attention. To tackle such perceptions, this chapter explores the complexities involved in refugees' deliberations about returning to country of origin. It shows that their seeming reluctance more often than not results from a lack of alternatives. In addition, many refugees are simply unable to return due to security risks at 'home'.

Security in Country of Origin versus Current Life in South Africa

I asked each of my respondents about their future plans including whether they would apply for permanent residence once eligible. Five participants expressed uncertainty over their futures and none answered immediately that he would do so. Only Roger had already applied for permanent residence.

Refugees continually debate and deliberate about returning to country of origin. In their 'cost-benefit analysis' possible dangers at 'home' are evaluated relative to material goods, safety, and prospects in the country of settlement. When asked if he would apply for permanent residence in South Africa, John answered "I don't know. I don't know" (John, interview, 21.05.2007). Having been tortured by the Ugandan security forces it is unlikely that guarantees could be made about John's security at this time should he return to Uganda. His wife has since come to join him in Cape Town and they have a young child too. Whilst John is not working in the field of his expertise and makes little money as an NGO worker, and whilst he still experiences no guarantee of his security in South Africa, these risks are far less direct than those he may face in Uganda. When asked how long he would remain in Cape Town, John answered:

I will live in Cape Town as long as I am still working with Alliance for Refugees. And Alliance for Refugees is just a baby at the moment. I really see this organisation as big, as helping 1000 clients. I will be happy with that. I'm not a professional in this but this is just a dream that I have. If this organisation can grow. Even if I can go out of it but it's having the capacity, the vision from which it was founded I'll be very glad. So I'm here until it grows. I'm here to see that we are producing results. That's why I'm here.

John has weighed up the security risks he faces should he return to Uganda against his present circumstances in South Africa. Over the past five years his NGO has become more closely integrated into the Cape Town-based refugee service provider network *Tutumike* and is also working closely with local government on some issues. His wife is employed and his young son was born in South Africa. These aspects encourage him to want to stay in South Africa.

Roger too sees little prospect of return to Rwanda, his country of origin.⁴⁰ As a member of a prominent political family tied to the past regime (see Chapter 2), Roger fears the new regime will target him for persecution. Paul Kagame's government has not distinguished itself in terms of its human rights record with arbitrary detentions, clamp downs on human rights groups, and questionable justice provided by the *gacaca* system providing sufficient

⁴⁰ Roger had contacted me initially for assistance with a permanent residence application. His initial application for permanent residence was rejected by the Standing Committee for Refugee Affairs who also announced their intention to withdraw his refugee status given their assessment of Rwanda as 'stable'. Over a period of three months I interviewed the family and conducted research which culminated in a request to the Standing Committee to hold a hearing for Roger given his credible grounds for indefinite refugee status.

material to fuel fears of persecution on return.⁴¹ Roger does thus face a credible threat of persecution should he return to Rwanda at present. In addition, Roger is becoming very settled in South Africa. Both he and his wife are in stable employment, their children are attending schools and his wife, Agathe, is completing a Bachelor of Commerce degree by correspondence with UNISA. The stability of this life contrasted with the uncertainties and possible threats of returning home mean that Roger has no intention of returning to Rwanda in the near future. Despite this, it is clear that Roger misses Rwanda. He regularly informed me of news in Rwanda and talked about the country a lot. Rwanda is still very much part of his thinking even if he cannot return at present.

Whilst returning 'home' presents risks, some will weigh these risks against perceived risks in South Africa. During the time I worked at UCT Law Clinic a number of refugees indicated that they would rather face the risks back home and began to make enquiries regarding voluntary repatriation. This was especially concerning given that some of these people intended to return to Mogadishu rather than face the violence that appeared to target Somalis in Cape Town (IRIN, 2006). Bosco too perceived himself as being at risk as a non-national in South Africa. He reported that several young African South Africans had threatened him saying 'When Mandela dies, we will kill all you foreigners'. This added to his fears about being in South Africa as he perceives that many South Africans "do not want refugees here" (Bosco, interview, 24.05.2007). Despite his fears, Bosco remains afraid of returning to Rwanda and accepts the difficulties of moving anywhere else with his wife and children as this would disrupt his wife and children's studies. Instead, Bosco has resigned himself to making the best of whatever opportunities he can find in South Africa as he sees himself here for the foreseeable future.

Ruffin too sees himself remaining in South Africa for the near future. He believes he will be targeted by the government in DRC should he return and so has committed himself to remaining in South Africa with his wife and children given the lack of an alternative.

As these examples illustrate, ongoing security concerns back 'home' mean that some of the respondents have given up hope of returning in the near future. The lack of mechanisms in place to ensure the safety of refugees once they return means that

⁴¹ The *gacaca* court system is a form of conflict resolution indigenous to Rwanda where alleged perpetrators and victims are brought together in the presence of other villagers and the case is heard by respected elders. There have

individuals would have to be certain before making the decision to return home voluntarily. At the same time, many refugees have become settled in South Africa and any desire to return home must also be weighed against what they have achieved in South Africa and whether the desire to return outweighs the risk of moving again.

***Length of Absence and Relationships with 'Home'*⁴²**

The length of time spent outside of one's country of origin and existing relationships with 'home' are also crucial factors in determining whether one returns. Once people have been out of the country for long periods they are likely to become more settled elsewhere. Whilst refugee status is supposed to be temporary, the reality for most is that people have often been away from their countries for so long by the time any relative stability returns that they have few or no remaining ties there. In many cases children will have been born in South Africa and thus not speak the languages of their country of origin. For them to return 'home' is thus to start a new life in an essentially 'foreign' country.

Jean has not returned to Rwanda since he fled at the age of 16 in 1994. In between he spent time in refugee camps in Burundi and Zimbabwe before arriving in South Africa in 2001. He has now been in the country for seven years which amounts to a significant proportion of his two children's lives. Jean has security concerns about returning to Rwanda. These are valid given the history of his family being killed there and ongoing reports about political opponents being arrested. I have heard similar fears from a large number of Rwandan nationals and their stories are lent support by reports from organisations such as Human Rights Watch (2002; 2007) and Amnesty International (2002; 2005).

Duncan: Is it an option to go back to Rwanda?

Jean: No I don't want to go.

Duncan: Why?

Jean: I don't want to go because even my family they all die there. I don't want to go there.

Duncan: How much do you know what is happening in Rwanda? What information do you get about there?

been concerns about the process in Rwanda and whether this safeguards the rights of all involved (AI, 2002).

⁴² I used the inverted commas in 'home' to denote that one's country of origin is not necessarily the place one regards as home.

Jean: But like now they lock people up for like nothing. Ya, they just lock people up for nothing. Some things like that.

Jean's fears of arbitrary arrest on return to Rwanda thus further fuel his decision not to return. Jean also no longer has a relationship with Rwanda after his family was killed during the genocide. This plays a major role in shaping his decision not to return. Evidence from all the respondents indicates that direct relationships with their country of origins plays a major role in determining their decision about returning. Direct relationships could take a number of different forms including contact with family members or friends or sending remittances to the country. In Jean's case it is likely that unless circumstances dictated otherwise, he would never return to live in Rwanda. He no longer has family there and it appears that his contact with the country has been severed.

In contrast, Simon has regular contact with Rwanda through his mother whom he speaks to every two weeks. She updates him on security developments and shapes his perceptions of opportunities and he thus maintains an emotional link to the country. Simon also contributes to his mother's income on a regular basis by sending remittances through Moneylink when items such as medicine are needed for the family. His stay outside the country is thus far more likely to be temporary and he has stated expressly that he wishes to return to Rwanda early this year. Whilst the money Simon sends his mother is useful, it appears to be used only for emergencies rather than something that she relies on. There is thus no family pressure on Simon to stay in South Africa to maintain these payments.

Access to Essential Services

Access to services that may not be available in the country of origin is also a key factor in deciding whether to stay in South Africa. In Jean's case, access to health care for his mentally challenged son is the major factor impacting on where he decides to settle.

Jean: No, Cape Town there is no problem but about my situation about my child who is sick. I can't afford because of him... If I can get some sponsor to sponsor him to go to school it can be better and also my wife she can do something to help him. But I can be running for everything, I can't manage it.

Duncan: What are your other options? Do you want to go overseas?

Jean: Ya, I already apply to go there. And I ask them even if they can't do that maybe they can take my child who is sick. Also it can be bad... I have to go with him. But myself I am

worried about the future. If I die or if he grows up, what he going to do? Because he can't go to the toilet by himself. He can't talk. Things like that. We do it for him. Myself I can't... I try how much I can but now my power is finished that's why I make a noise for him for anyone who can hear my noise.

Jean's primary concern is around the health of his child. Circumstances are clearly difficult for him in South Africa – and are likely to be so anywhere, given his child's condition. Although Jean has stable work, his wife is not working and seems depressed. There are difficult circumstances around his oldest child attending crèche due to the fees and there is the constant challenge of caring for his younger son. Jean has even applied for resettlement stating that even if they couldn't take him, perhaps they could at least take his child so that he can get the proper care he requires. This is a drastic step and indicative of how desperate Jean is about health care for his son - even to the extent that he would be prepared to allow his family to be separated with either his son alone or he and his son being resettled anywhere his son would have improved access to health care. Whilst many refugees have expressed an interest in being resettled in a country in Europe or Canada, Jean has expressed no such preference but views resettlement only as a possible way to improve his son's situation. Jean's case is unusual but issues such as access to essential services may be a key factor for many refugees in deciding whether to stay in South Africa or move elsewhere.

Employment Possibilities

Perceptions around the possibilities of employment on return to one's country of origin are also influential in determining one's movements. Simon explained his desire to return to Rwanda but was concerned about economic opportunities available to him there.⁴³ In the meantime he was saving money to be able to afford to open a business on his return. Simon's key purpose in initially contacting me was to see whether I could contribute towards his planned business. Simon felt that he was unable to rely on the possibility of finding work in Rwanda and thus felt it necessary to start his own business. Despite these challenges, Simon's desire to return to Rwanda remains strong.

Duncan: You were talking before about going back to Rwanda?

⁴³ Simon had actually initiated contact with me for the first time in a long while prior to our interview in order to discuss the possibility of going into business together. He was looking for capital in order to open a restaurant or trading store in Kigali. He was planning to be able to return to Rwanda in early 2008.

Simon: Maybe one more year in Cape Town.

Duncan: And then straight back to Rwanda?

Simon: Ya.

Duncan: For how long?

Simon: For me I would appreciate to return forever if I get there because I hear the people they say it's nice. If it's safe, forever for me.

Safety in Rwanda is not a major concern for Simon. Negative stories he may hear about the situation in Rwanda are mitigated by the presence of his mother in Kigali. Although security is not irrelevant for him, the key determinant is the possibility of finding employment: "She tells me it is safe but the job is not easy to get it. If you've got something to work it's no problem" (Simon, interview, 16.05.2007).

Even if perceptions are that conditions allow one to return to one's country of origin safely, some may remain longer in South Africa because of concerns about work prospects at 'home'. Refugee status does not allow people to return 'home' and then return to South Africa if they do not find the situation amenable. Once a person chooses to return 'home', refugee status is relinquished, rendering the choice/decision so critical.

Conclusion

This chapter has challenged the notion that refugees intend to stay indefinitely in South Africa to take advantage of the resources available. The responses of the six participants underscore the complexity of decision-making around staying, returning 'home' or relocating elsewhere. Some of the complexities relate to refugees weighing up the potential security risks should they return against the conditions in which they find themselves in South Africa. In some cases, security threats are ongoing and make a return in the near future unlikely. In some cases, despite a measure of security in the country of origin, the degree to which refugees have been able to access opportunities such as commencing studies in South Africa impacts upon decisions to stay or leave.

The length of time which refugees have spent outside of their country of origin as well as the existence of relationships with that country also play a major role in determining whether a person is likely to return. The evidence suggests that the longer people have stayed away, the less likely they are to return in the near future. Those with ongoing

relationships with their country of origin through contact with family members or friends still in the country are more likely to return in the near future. Access to essential services can also play a major role in determining whether people are likely to return to their country of origin.

In light of these factors, the evidence clearly illustrates that decisions over future movements are complicated and not shaped primarily around economic factors. The perception that refugees intend to remain in South Africa indefinitely and primarily for economic reasons is thus proved false.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Perceptions of refugees in South Africa are generally negative, despite their presence in the legal category of 'refugee' in the country in significant numbers being a relatively new phenomenon. While myths and stereotypes about all non-nationals abound, this research has tackled some of the prevailing myths about refugees. In many instances the negative perceptions have led to attacks on non-nationals across the country in both urban and rural settings. South Africans of varying backgrounds have also demonstrated their prejudices by denying refugees access to services to which they are entitled, calling them names such as the derogatory *makwerekwere* (babblers), or suggesting they are responsible for crime in the country. Government officials have done little to tackle such prejudices, and in some cases government ministers themselves have fuelled the antagonism, as in the case of Buthelezi (see Chapters 1 and 3).

As a newly democratic state, South Africa prides itself on a Constitution that guarantees rights to all within its borders. Yet this, as with so many other policies, has proven difficult to implement in practice. The rights of refugees and other non-nationals in the country are far from protected and the widespread public prejudice against them needs to be tackled effectively. As a starting point, this thesis examined selected perceptions against evidence from the six research participants and from my own experience. Material presented in Chapter 2 illustrated the complexity of refugees' decisions to seek asylum in South Africa, thus exposing the assumption of the economy being an 'inevitable lure' as both inaccurate and a gross oversimplification of complex social and political realities relating to the mass movement of people in Africa. This myth ignores the evidence that people left their countries primarily due to 'push factors' that put their lives at risk. Deciding where to seek asylum was then a secondary process shaped by various factors: information provided through social networks, the lack of security in refugee camps, the perception of greater opportunities for one's family, and, crucially, a lack of viable alternatives. The belief that refugees leave their countries of origin primarily in order to take advantage of South Africa's resources is thus false. Government and civil society need to challenge the common perception that refugees are primarily attracted to South Africa to seek employment. Doing so would help allay fears of increased competition for scarce jobs and poor South Africans would then perhaps feel less threatened by the presence of refugees.

Perceptions of refugees as helpless and 'needy' are also widespread, especially among state and NGO personnel who deal with refugees. Utilising the initial responses of respondents on arrival in Cape Town, Chapter 3 illustrated the resourcefulness and resilience of refugees when faced with the multiple difficulties of being strangers in a completely unfamiliar setting. The respondents quickly used a variety of strategies to obtain information and create opportunities for themselves, thus highlighting the inaccuracy of the perception that all refugees are completely helpless and in need of immediate direct intervention. One implication of their demonstrated resourcefulness is that refugees are not in South Africa to try to access welfare provisions. Thus rather than being threatening, the presence of resourceful resilient people should be seen as an asset and their skills and energy harnessed to contribute to the development of the country.

Chapter 4 examined the perception that refugees 'use up' South Africa's resources and 'steal' jobs from South Africans. The evidence presented illustrated the obstacles refugees face in their efforts to obtain the legal documents necessary to access services or find formal employment. In addition, NGO service provision is limited, difficult to access and sometimes inappropriate. As a result of these problems, refugees create opportunities for themselves by networking and through chance encounters. Thus the evidence refutes the notion that refugees 'use up' South Africa's already stretched resources and 'steal' jobs from locals, with a negative impact on the country. It demonstrates, rather, their ability to create new opportunities in order to become self-reliant despite the limited assistance they receive. This is not to suggest that no assistance is necessary for refugees. On the contrary, timely, appropriate and efficient interventions would avoid, or at least reduce most refugees' distress, hasten their integration and thus fulfil South Africa's international obligations more rapidly and smoothly than is currently the case.

Finally, Chapter 5 explored the perception that refugees intend to stay in South Africa indefinitely to take advantage of its resources. Once again people's actual experiences highlighted the oversimplification of this generalised perception. Staying or leaving is neither a free choice nor a simple matter for most refugees and the evidence presented in this chapter showed the variable, multiple and complex elements involved in evaluating whether to stay or leave. In many if not most cases, refugees simply have no alternative but to stay in South Africa, given the lack of security in their country of origin and their own

meagre resources. Some have simply lost contact with their country of origin having left many years earlier. The evidence presented thus led to the conclusion that refugees do not remain in South Africa simply to take advantage of its resources but are rather involved in making complex decisions taking into account factors such as their situation in South Africa and potential security risks in their country of origin. The perception that people plan to stay in the country indefinitely due to South Africa's resources is therefore false. This is significant in terms of South Africa's foreign policy. If South Africa is concerned about the presence of refugees it can do more to address the root causes of why people leave their countries and why they feel they cannot return. In some cases people have been outside of their country of origin for too long to make a return feasible, but in cases where there are concerns about security or employment prospects, South Africa can play a greater role in creating pressure for changes in certain countries through mechanisms such as the African Union, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism.

In addition to the value of this research for government, I have found the research process immensely valuable in challenging my own perceptions. As I indicated in Chapter 3, prior to this research I too had conceptualised refugees as helpless and always in dire need and had overlooked the resourcefulness many demonstrate. As a practitioner working in the sector, it has been important to recognise that perception as an uncritical assumption. Without either 'romanticising' refugees or underestimating the seriousness of their plight, I can now introduce the recognition and value of refugees' agency in my work with the various national refugee service providers where that recognition is missing. This can serve to ensure that the services provided to refugees are more appropriate than current practice and the limited resources can perhaps be concentrated on those who desperately need interventions.

There are many further challenges in working with refugees in South Africa. There is still a long way to go to ensuring that all the rights to which refugees are entitled are recognised. By questioning and challenging existing assumptions with adequate and appropriate evidence, we are able to reconsider the ways in which we perceive refugees and can thus respond more appropriately and effectively.

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